

MARGERY MORRIS AND PLAIN JANE



VIOLET GORDON GRAY



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SHE OPENED ONE OF THE LETTERS

MARGERY MORRIS *and* PLAIN JANE

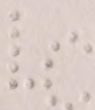
By

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"Margery Morris, Mascot"*

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Margery Morris and Plain Jane

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Introduction

THE first book, "Margery Morris," was the story of a young girl in a quaint old Quaker town in New Jersey. It told of the friends she made and the fun and mishaps she had, and of the great surprise she received at the end.

The second book, "Margery Morris, Mascot," is the account of the winter and spring that followed the events in the first book. Margery, who longed for a career, hit upon the unassuming one of "mascot" and decided to bring all the happiness she could into the lives of others. Unfortunately this was not as simple as it seemed, and her well-intentioned efforts brought her embarrassment and trial. She struggled on, however, until just as she was on the point of giving way to discouragement, a final resolution to stick it out brings her success and happiness once more.

The third book, "Margery Morris and Plain Jane," tells of the summer Margery spends at the beautiful seashore place of Wy-

anoke, where she lives a wonderfully happy and healthy out-of-door life surrounded by her friends. Among these is a new friend, Jane Gale, or "Plain Jane," as she calls herself, who is suffering from a keen disappointment and is discouraged and sad. Margery helps her to a more normal view of life, and when the shadow of tragedy creeps near them, they both learn some great truths and a new peace and happiness.

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Margery Morris and Plain Jane

CHAPTER I

JANE

THE wind blew softly in from the sea, stirring the branches of the pine-tree, stunted and bent by winter storms, and nodded the daisies blooming in the tall grass. It fluttered the blue cloak of the girl on the boulder, and played with the locks of dark hair escaping from under the edges of the red silk handkerchief bound about her head. It even took liberties with the uncompromising headgear of the five middle-aged ladies who, grouped in a semicircle, were busily engaged in sketching the pine-tree and the girl.

“I’m so tired of posing,” sighed Jane plain-

tively. "I've sat here on this hard rock and stared at that cow tethered over there so long that when I turn my eyes and look out on the bay I can see the cow floating in the air."

"It has impressed itself on the retina of your eye, Jane," explained one of the ladies learnedly.

"You can rest after a while," remarked another.

"Besides, you may look anywhere you wish—except when I'm painting your eyes," chimed in a third.

The good ladies were not at all inclined to pause in their morning's work, especially since they had captured such a charming model and such a delightful spot wherein to paint.

Jane flushed and fixed her eyes once more on the cow. She wished wearily that when five of the dullest and most inefficient members of her art class had happened to come along the road past her cottage that morning and insisted on her posing for them under her "lovely" pine-tree she had been quick-witted and resolute enough to refuse. Her fatal shyness again! Overcome with embarrassment she had stood first on one foot and then on the

other, stammering something inarticulate, and had finally found herself wrapped in her blue cloak with a red silk handkerchief bound round her head for a piece of "nice color," sitting on a hard and uncomfortable rock staring at a cow. There were so many things that she wanted to do that morning, too!

She wished that she were not too shy to tell them firmly that she was tired and was going to stop posing—for a few minutes while she rested, at any rate. For poor bashful Jane there was little pleasure in meeting her fellow-beings. And, as though she were not shy enough already there was always her unruly tongue to trip her up and cause her an agony of mortification. That dreadful tongue that would order "keys and parrots" for dinner, when all that Jane desired was peas and carrots, and that made her "shoo some buys," when she only wanted to buy some shoes, and that told guests that she was so sorry that they had come, when she was trying to express her pleasure at their arrival. If she had only been able to obtain the self-assurance possessed by some of her schoolmates, Jane would willingly have suffered martyrdom.

“To think,” suddenly remarked one of the sketchers, waving her brush in the direction of Jane’s little cottage, “that little house was probably once painted white, a regular little white green-shuttered, red-roofed, elm-shaded, New-England home.”

Jane forgot her shyness for the moment. “Oh, I love the wonderful, silvery-gray the storms have faded it into,” she said breathlessly. “I like it much better than white paint! I know the place is shamrackle—ramshackle, I mean—and down at the heel—but if it were all ship-shape and painted up, we could rent it well, and then we’d be too conscientious to stay in it, I suppose. Besides, it is artistic—just look at it now with that big bed of phlox and larkspur against its gray walls. No, indeed, no white paint for me!”

“Oh, I didn’t mean to say anything against your cottage,” hastily apologized the other. “I—I meant to say wasn’t it just funny to think that it once had paint on it. Indeed—I think it’s very pretty—much more artistic this way.”

“Keep the pose, please, Miss Gale,” ordered a gray-haired little lady behind a tall bamboo

travelling easel. "I am just painting your cap against the trunk of the pine-tree."

Obediently, Jane screwed herself into the attitude she had held most of the morning, and let her thoughts drift off to the little cottage.

The little place, Buttercup Cottage, as it was called, had been left to Jane together with a tiny income on the death of her godmother the winter before. For years Jane and her mother and elder sister had lived in boarding-houses, and the thought of having a home had always appeared to her the most delightful thing on earth. How she envied the girls who had big, comfortable homes, and big, comfortable families, and big, comfortable incomes.

Mrs. Gale was a busy, hard-worked teacher, who added to a slender income by tutoring outside of school hours, and Jane's elder sister, Marion, a pretty, frail girl of eighteen, was the private secretary of a busy woman doctor. Jane could remember a time when things had been different, when her father was alive and there had been a pretty house and plenty of money. Her mother had been a young woman then, gay and charming, and there were many lively and amusing people coming to the house.

Jane, remembering the pretty, merry young mother who was always going off to dinners and theatre parties in the loveliest of dresses, often wondered how her mother stood the monotonous grind of her present life.

But now, she felt, things were going to be different. They had the little cottage where Jane and her mother could spend long, restful summers, and Marion come for her two weeks' vacation. And "Aunt" Jane's little legacy would allow Jane to study at the summer art school held in the adjoining town of Winchester, and perhaps permit her to have some art lessons in the winter, instead of having to serve as a nursery governess after school hours to an obstreperous family of young children. It would rescue her mother, too, from the tutoring she found such a strain, and give Marion some of the pretty clothes and simple pleasures her young soul longed for.

Jane's eyes sparkled as she thought of the happy summer they were going to have, and with an involuntary thrill of happiness she suddenly drew up her knees and resting her soft cheek against them, breathed a little song of thanksgiving.

“Miss *Gale!*” protested a shocked voice, “keep the pose—*please!*”

Jane hastily straightened herself out, and wished impatiently that those tiresome women would go home. There was such a lot that she wanted to do that morning! Things that Cousin Wilhelmina would be certain to get wrong. Her mother had been away ever since the close of school, tutoring the daughter of a wealthy old friend, and she would be home now in a day or two. Jane, who had been painting and refurbishing with her own deft hands the little sitting-room of the cottage, was anxious to have it entirely finished before then. If only those women hadn't caught her!

A bell rang on a yacht anchored in the bay below. Jane twitched.

“I'm afraid,” she said despairingly, “that I can't pose much longer. It's almost noon, and I haven't got anything yet for lunch. And the doors we steal at in the village close at one on Wednesdays.”

“‘The doors you steal at,’” murmured a horrified voice.

Jane giggled. “I mean,” she cried, “the stores where we deal. They close at one on

Wednesdays so that the shop people can have a half-holiday. And then I have to go to the refrigerator for the mail." For some reason, when she was nervous or embarrassed, Jane always spoke of post-offices, banks, elevators and all such institutions of public service as "refrigerators" and posted her letters, deposited money, or was shot skyward in a department store, all in a refrigerator.

The leader of the sketchers drew out her watch. "We'll have to hurry, if we're going to catch that half-past twelve trolley," she announced, "and if we don't get it, we won't get any lunch."

"I don't see why they can't wait for us," sighed the little lady who was always late.

"That's the worst of boarding-houses," complained another, beginning to pack up her sketching things. "They are so fussy about meals being on time."

Jane caught at a swaying branch of pine above her head and pulled herself to her feet. "Let me see what kind of a creature you have made of me," she laughed. "Think of having one's portrait painted by five such geniuses."

There seemed to have been a difference of

opinion among the five as to Jane's actual appearance. One had pictured her with an eagle beak of pronounced Roman tendencies and a small retreating chin, while to another her chin was long and aggressive below a pert and aspiring nose. While a third had boldly and originally provided her with a basin-face. In only one of the portraits was there any resemblance to the real Jane with her delicate features, and wide, dreaming, gray eyes. "Plain Jane" she called herself, for to Jane, and to her contemporaries, she was too fragile and too colorless to be pretty. Only those of her elders who were possessed of the seeing eye recognized the beauty that might develop under a happier and more care-free life.

The ladies having departed with many last words and kind promises to return soon to paint Jane again, she dashed into the house, threw her cloak on the chair, and pinning on a wide black hat in place of the discarded red handkerchief, ran down the narrow road that wound its way above the rocks to the elm-shaded, white-housed, old fishing village of Wyanoke. The sun shone down warmly upon her and a fresh breeze stirred the late daisies

and buttercups in the long grass beside the road. A bluebird swayed on a wild rose-bush just bursting into bloom and sang of summer joys. Below the rocks the blue waters of the bay sparkled in the sunshine, the white sailboats darted hither and thither, and an ocean-going yacht, slender and graceful, lay anchored.

With a sigh of happiness, Jane bent down to pick a cluster of fragrant wild strawberries. How perfect it all was. And what a wonderful summer they were going to have.

The clock in the village steeple struck half-past twelve, and with a gasp Jane stopped dreaming and sped on her way. The shops would be closed if she did not hurry. But as she ran, she could not keep her eyes from the bay and the great sand-dunes on the opposite shore standing dazzling white against a cloudless blue sky. The road turned abruptly at the end of the rocky promontory and led down the hill into the village. With her head turned for a last backward glance at bay and shore, Jane dashed around the corner, almost straight into the mud-guard of an automobile just rounding the turn.

With a startled scream she threw herself back, caught her heel in a tuft of grass and came down full length on her side in a cluster of daisies. There was a violent screeching of brakes and the car stopped a few feet farther on. Its driver, and the young girl with him, jumped out and ran back to her.

"I hope you aren't hurt," they both cried at once.

Jane scrambled to her feet and stood gazing at a pleasant faced lad and a very pretty young girl about her own age. "I'm not a bit hurt," she assured them as soon as she could get her breath. "I'm—I'm just—startled."

"I do hope you're not hurt," repeated the boy.

"We're ever so sorry," chimed in the girl, pulling her hat from off her blond curls and fanning Jane violently, evidently feeling that first aid of some kind must be rendered. "I do hope that you're not hurt."

"Not a bit," murmured Jane politely, beginning to realize that she was feeling rather shaken.

"We were so absorbed in that view—forgot

to blow my horn—ran into you . . .” the boy explained in a breath.

“I’m afraid that *I* ran into *you*—I ought to have heard you coming, but I was so absorbed in the view.”

They all laughed.

A silence fell, then for no reason they all laughed again.

Jane felt her fatal shyness stealing upon her; she ought to hurry on her way, she knew, but her feet seemed fastened to the ground for all eternity.

“I wonder,” asked the girl, pinning her hat back on her curls, “if you could tell us how to get to Vinehaven—and about how far it is. A box of books belonging to my grandfather was sent there by mistake—and we’re chasing after it.”

“Yes,” echoed the lad, “I wonder if you could tell us. I’m just here for the day and I’m not very well up on the country round about, and the directions of the old chap at the express office were pretty confusing.”

Jane flushed. “I—I—really don’t know how to get there. It’s somewhere in that direction,” waving a vague hand toward the hori-

zon. "I think that it's about ten miles, though, as the fly crows." She stopped, and her face flushed still more crimson. "I mean," she corrected in a low voice, "it's about ten miles as—as the crow flies."

They all laughed once more and Jane went on:

"But almost anyone along the road can tell you how to get there. But perhaps—you'd better ask at the refrigerator. I mean," she cried, "I mean the post-office!"

Then feeling that she had succeeded in completely disgracing herself, she turned on her heel and ran down the road toward the village.

CHAPTER II

THE LETTER

ALL the way down the hill Jane scolded herself. Why, she asked herself indignantly, must she always turn scarlet, and be flustered in that ridiculous way? Why couldn't she be dignified and polite and self-confident like other girls? That nice boy and girl had looked so bewildered. How unconscious the girl was—and how pretty, with her blond curls tied back with a wide black ribbon. She wished Marion and her mother could have seen her. And the boy was so nice and polite; her mother, she thought, would have said that there was strength in his square chin, and humor in his rather long upper lip and turned-up nose; while Marion would have admired his black hair and the blue eyes that seemed all the bluer for the clear tan of his skin. She wondered who the young people were and if they would

belong to the summer colony she had watched with so much interest and a certain wistfulness the summer before when she had paid "Aunt" Jane a visit at Buttercup Cottage.

"Well, I won't get to know them, anyway—they will be too busy having a good time to notice a dull thing like me," Jane sighed, with a vindictive jerk at the head of a tall daisy growing by the roadside. "I'm just tired and sick of always looking on at other people having a good time. I'm just like a little darky boy plastering his nose against the window of a candy shop. I wonder how it seems to be pretty and popular, and to have a good time. I wonder how it feels to look like that girl."

In a moment or two, Jane forgot all thoughts about being pretty or not being pretty in the never failing pleasure of the quaint village street with its spreading elms and old houses, painted white and set in green dooryards. Again she thanked the memory of the kind godmother who had given her the little home by the sea.

Her purchases over, she turned another corner and stopped before the village post-office. She always rather dreaded the sorting of the

noon mail, for that was the social hour of the village when the summer people and the "natives" flocked to the little building to chatter and gossip and make engagements for the rest of the day. Jane never felt quite so alone and out of place as when she was among that gay crowd. Everyone seemed to know everybody else, and she to know scarcely anyone beyond a few of the old ladies who had been acquaintances of her godmother's, a fisherman or two, and the woman who maltreated the clothes under the name of washing them.

To-day almost everyone had gone, and there were only a few stragglers left, absorbed in the letters they were reading.

Jane hurried forward to the window. "Any mail for me, Mrs. Goodwin?"

The postmistress hesitated. "What's yer name?" she demanded.

"Jane Gale," answered Jane briefly. It was rather a sore point with her that Mrs. Goodwin never could remember her name. She always seemed to know the names of all the other cottagers.

Mrs. Goodwin reached behind a row of pigeonholes and after slowly thumbing over

a pile of mail, agonizing to eager Jane, she handed over two letters and a paper.

Once more in the green, sun-flecked street, Jane opened one of the letters, and as she walked slowly along skimmed its pages.

"Dearest Janeykins," it began, "I do hope you are well and being a good girl." Jane smiled at this, for never did her mother commence a letter to her without it. "And that you are not making Cousin Willy too much trouble. Be certain to order the things you and she like—and don't worry about its being extravagant. It seems hard to realize that I'll be with you in a few days, and that my stay here is almost over. It has been a wonderful change for me, and I feel like another person. Alice is a dear child, and no trouble at all to teach. I feel certain that with the coaching she's had she will be able to enter Miss Hylan's next fall."

Jane stood still, and reading carefully the next few lines, noted with satisfaction that her mother seemed in better health and spirits than she had been for a long time. Then skipping an account of several long automobile rides and a dinner with some old friends, she put the

letter in her pocket and went on her homeward way.

At the end of the village where the road turned and climbed up toward the top of the hill, stood a long, low, white stucco cottage with verandas and brick terraces running out to the very rocks themselves, and a large garden, gay with old-fashioned flowers, sweet-williams and columbines, pansies and bleeding-heart, and now Damask roses and brilliant phlox just coming into bloom, between the house and the street. It had been closed during the beginning of the season, for its artist owner was abroad, but Jane had noticed several days before that someone was living there. "It's too ducky a house," she had said to Cousin Willy, "to be all blind and sad behind closed shutters. It ought to have somebody young and pretty living there to make it gay."

As Jane neared it, a handsome old man and two ladies, evidently mother and daughter, came to the gate and stood there chatting. They seemed very gay and happy, pleased with themselves and the world. She noted with a wistful pang their care-free expression. "That might be mother and Marion," she thought.

“That girl is just about Marion’s age. I wish that Marion looked as rosy and strong as she does. But it’s wonderful,” with a sigh of contentment, “to think that mother is going to be here all summer, and that she can get really rested and built up.”

The little group dissolved; the old gentleman turned back to the house, and the others moved off toward the cluster of handsome villas known as Perkins Point, the girl calling back as she went, “Don’t you think, Mr. Morris, that Margery and I might be bridesmaids?”

Her mother laughed and, pulling at her sleeve, urged her onward.

Idly wondering who was to be married and thinking how delightful it must be to have a wide circle of friends and go to weddings and parties, Jane continued on her way. She had only been to two weddings in all her quiet life, but she considered them the most delightful of functions and longed to go to more.

“I wonder who those people are,” she thought with a backward glance at the cottage. “That man is handsome and distinguished enough to be someone—but I do wish he were young and pretty to go with his house.”

At the top of the rocks Jane sat down on a boulder beside the road to finish her mother's letter. "When I come home, Janey dear, I have a strange piece of news to tell you. I do hope that for my sake you will take it bravely, and that you will realize how much happiness it will bring into our lives. And indeed, dear, my joy is not all selfish. I cannot but feel that it will make life take a turn for you and Marion and be cheerful now. My girls have been so brave and patient. And remember, dear, always, how much I love you."

Jane read over the letter slowly and carefully, and then read it again. "What does it mean?" she thought with a clutch at her heart. "Oh, it's all right—of course, it's all right," she reassured herself. "Mother said it would bring happiness."

She sat staring at the distant sand-dunes. "I wonder what it can be," she repeated. "Can mother have obtained a new position—somewhere that will take her away from us? Well, anyway," she comforted herself, "it's all right, mother said so. She said that things are going to take a turn and be cheerful. That proves that things are all right. And anyway,

even if she does have to go away to some other school, she'll be here all summer."

She rose slowly and went on her way. The sun still shone down warmly, the bay still sparkled, and the wind still nodded the wild rose-bushes; she found another wild strawberry and ate it; but her mood had changed. To her volatile nature the berries had lost their savor, the sun was glaring, and the sea wind brought with it a threat of rain or fog; the bay seemed uninteresting.

"I do wish that mother hadn't said 'take it bravely,' " she thought at last, impatient with her own depression. "That's what is making me feel sad. Besides," she consulted her letter again, "she says life will 'take a turn and be cheerful.' Perhaps if she does go away she'll have a very much larger salary."

She tucked her packages tighter under her arms and ran across the grass to the side door of Buttercup Cottage, singing to herself, "take a turn and be cheerful, be cheerful, be cheerful."

In the charming dining-room with its quaint little old-fashioned fireplace, and low windows, Jane found a gray-haired little woman, whose

primness seemed incongruous with her rosy plumpness, perched on the top of a tall step-ladder. "Oh, Cousin Willy," she cried, suddenly resolving to say nothing about her mother's letter, "here are the things for luncheon—and I'm almost starved. What are you doing?" she added with a laugh.

Cousin Willy scrambled down with remarkable agility considering her weight and gray hairs. "Why, you see, Jane," she explained, "I bought this cretonne at a bargain one day—not that I wanted it—but it was so cheap. And I thought that I had better get it, for you never know—and it just occurred to me it might make nice hangings for the windows."

Jane looked at the cretonne, her quick artistic sense rebelling at its glaring color in her cool little green and white dining-room, but she only said tactfully, "Well, we can try the curtains and then if we don't like them after a day or two, we can take them down."

Still humming her little song, "be cheerful, be cheerful, take a turn and be cheerful," Jane went into the kitchen and began to prepare luncheon. After the years of boarding-houses, Jane delighted in the little kitchen with its win-

dows hung with honeysuckle and its little back porch with a view of the sea. She took a housewifely pride in the shining pots and pans and in the shelf of little boxes labeled cinnamon, ginger, allspice, and sage, and found a certain little book, "Cooking for Two," more soul-satisfying than the most touching novel. She almost, but not quite, enjoyed the dishwashing. "It's lovely up until after the cups are washed," she would declare, dipping the glasses delicately into the hot, soapy water, "and it's fine after it's all over and you're putting the nice clean dishes away, but there's an unpleasant interval between."

"There's always an unpleasant interval in everything," Cousin Willy would philosophize, and deciding that the flowers needed watering, or cutting, or looking at, would escape out of the kitchen.

After luncheon was over, Jane took a handful of bread-crumbs and went out on the front portico, with its graceful hood and narrow high benches facing each other, the skilful work of some long-dead New England builder. A little wren who had built her nest in the top of one of the portico posts year after year re-

garded Jane's advent as an insult and never failed to scold at her in the most vigorous language known to birddom.

"To hear you squeaking and shrieking, Jennie-wren," Jane laughed to-day, looking at the tiny brown thing perched on the back of one of the benches, every feather ruffled and little mouth wide open with indignation, "no one would ever imagine that you can sing sweetly when you wish to."

Idly watching the bird, Jane sat down on the doorstep, her hands folded in her lap. Luncheon and the cool quiet of the little old cottage had soothed her depressed spirit. An automobile passed and looking up, she caught sight of the boy and girl she had met earlier in the morning. The girl recognizing her, nodded and waved, and the boy smiled with a flash of white teeth.

"Who are they, Jane?" asked her cousin behind her.

"I don't know—I saw them in the village this morning—they almost ran over me—or I almost ran over them—I don't know which. The girl is very pretty—the loveliest blond hair, and the boy has the blackest hair and the

bluest eyes and brownest skin I ever saw. He'd match your new hat beautifully, Cousin Willy," she added teasingly. Cousin Willy's hats were a constant amusement to Jane.

"Did you say they ran over you, or almost did?"

"Yes." Jane flushed, and looked embarrassed. She had remembered suddenly how she had stammered and stuttered and the absurd things she had said. No wonder, she thought painfully, that the boy had smiled when he saw her.

"Why are you looking so flustered?" asked Cousin Willy, and then as Jane only turned redder and did not answer, she added, "Did you hear from mother?"

"Yes," said Jane hastily, "I had a letter."

"What did she have to say?"

"Oh, nothing much."

"Did she seem well?" prodded Cousin Willy.

"Yes—oh, yes, very well. And she says that life is going to take a churn and be tearful," and Jane gazed after the retreating automobile, unconscious of how truly she had spoken.

CHAPTER III

MARGERY

COUSIN WILLY's hobby was the pursuit of bargains. The department stores were the jungle through which she tracked her prey, diving through a crowd about a table in the center aisle to emerge later with a bunch of braid and a battered feather as trophy. The value to her lay not in the suitability of the article or her need for it, but in its descent. "See," she would say, displaying a pair of green satin slippers, "two dollars—reduced from fifteen. They were made to order for somebody who didn't take them after all. They are a little small for me, but ——"

Cousin Willy's "second best hobby," as Jane put it, was the training of her young cousins. Fearful lest the love of their frankly adoring mother might lead them to overrate themselves, she rushed to the other extreme and revealed to them their every deficiency,

mental and physical,—those that they might have in some far distant future, as well as the ones that they already had.

“If she’d only let you believe in yourself a little bit,” Jane would wail. “Don’t you remember, mother, when we read Stevenson together, the part where he said something about falling through story after story of the house of one’s vanity and sitting rueful among the ruins? Well, that’s the way with Cousin Willy, she knocks me clean through the house of my vanity—and every time I try to get up she hits me on the head with a brick-bat.”

Jane’s mother would sigh and regret to herself that the only relative they had, on whom they were forced to depend so much for companionship, should always be pointing out her limitations to Jane, timid, self-depreciating Jane, who needed encouragement, not criticism.

Cousin Willy was a little more inclined to be fault-revealing than usual the day that Mrs. Gale was expected home and it was with a sense of relief that Jane saw her pin on a large hat, a remarkable bargain, and depart to play bridge with some acquaintances at the hotel.

Alone in the cottage, Jane arranged a gray ginger-jar of wild roses on her mother's bureau, and a big bowl of daisies and buttercups on the living-room table, before she put on the white linen Mrs. Mulready had just brought home from the wash, and her black hat.

Carefully locking the front door, she hid the key, after the trusting fashion of Wyanoke, in the little green Japanese wall-vase hanging by the front door, and suddenly panic-stricken for fear she might be late for the half-past two car, sped along the rocks to the winding cross road that stopped where, under an enormous elm, an ancient crippled Civil War veteran kept a tiny general store and waiting-room for the trolley, and sold candy and tobacco, yesterday's newspapers and bottles of ginger ale and sarsaparilla.

In the excitement and hurry and the joy of realizing that her mother was almost home again, and the wonderful summer they had planned together was about to commence, Jane forgot to be shy, and chattered away to the old storekeeper.

"Guess all you young people is goin' to have a fine time this summer," he remarked in

answer; "there's a right smart lot of you. There's a family from down to Noo Jersey just come—there's a girl there. She's got bright yeller hair and a big dog, 'Waldo,' I heard her a-callin' him. An' there's a friend of theirs, a Mrs. Endicott from California—she's got a daughter Katherine. Older than you, she be. An' they had a boy with 'em t'other day—ain't seed 'em since, so I guess he ain't here regular. Smart lookin' fellow he was, too; tanned as brown as a nigger, an' teeth as white as a dog's. An' I heard this here girl from Noo Jersey sayin'—— Pshaw, there comes yer car."

The small, swaying trolley car rounded the curve, stopped in front of the little station, and Jane got aboard.

As the car reached the main street of the village it stopped again and the pretty girl whom Jane had encountered in her collision with the automobile got in, carrying a dress-suit case.

"I wonder if she's the girl from 'Noo Jersey,'" Jane thought, as she watched her pay her fare to the conductor at the rear door. The other passengers turned to look too, pleas-

ure in their eyes, and the old gentleman, fat and irritable looking, who was sitting across the aisle from Jane, actually lowered his newspaper for half a minute. Unconscious of the little stir her advent had created, the girl picked up her dress-suit case and attempted to walk to the front of the lurching car, where the windows were open. As she swayed up the narrow aisle, the car gave an extra lurch as it swerved round a corner. She clutched frantically at the dangling straps; but her right foot flew out and gave a violent kick to the old gentleman behind the newspaper, and she collapsed into a seat, an ignominious heap, her hat dangling over one eye. The other passengers laughed—all except the old gentleman, who evidently regarded her methods of entering trolley cars as one more instance of modern bad manners; while the girl herself sat limp and helpless, too overcome with laughter even to straighten her hat. Catching sight, however, of the old gentleman's disgusted countenance, she pulled herself together, and apologized with such deference and concern that he visibly forgave her, and even joined her when, after a struggle

to look grave, she burst into another gale of laughter.

Jane watched her with wistful eyes, envying her charm and her unconsciousness. The girl turned toward her, but Jane in an agony of shyness looked away, wondering miserably if the other would recognize her and if she ought to speak. But the girl evidently had no such doubts; slipping along the seat until she was close to Jane, she said frankly:

“Oh, I’m so glad to see a familiar face! But I always do the most dreadful things when you are around! First we nearly run over you,—and now I go around kicking harmless old gentlemen.”

She stopped, overcome with laughter again, while Jane stole a look at her out of the corner of her eye; how pretty she was, she thought again, a delicate, high-bred prettiness that held no hint of self-consciousness or pose.

“My name is Morris—Margery Morris,” said the girl tentatively, as though in turn she would like to know Jane’s name.

But Jane was too embarrassed to respond to the hint. “You come from New Jersey, don’t you?” she asked, a little breathlessly.

Margery repressed a smile. "Yes," she answered, "my grandfather lives there. This is my first visit to Wyanoke—I wonder if you could tell me where there is a tailor in Winchester?"

Jane, absorbed in noting the embroidery on Margery's perfectly fitting pink linen frock, and her immaculate white stockings and buckskin pumps, failed to catch the question. "Oh, what?—oh, I beg pardon—I ——"

"I just asked if you know where there is a tailor in Winchester?"

Feeling that she had been caught rudely staring, Jane grew more embarrassed. "I don't know," she murmured, looking intently out of the window at a passing milk-wagon.

"Oh," said Margery.

Jane turned scarlet. What a rude bumpkin she must seem. "Do you have to know?" she blurted, feeling a desperate need of saying something, then turned even redder than before.

Margery appeared not to notice. "Why, yes, I do," she said gayly. "I've been trusted to do the family errands. The automobile is

being washed, so I put my things in the dress-suit case and came along. My heavy coat got so mussed in the trunk that I want to get it pressed by a tailor. And then perhaps you could tell me where there is a druggist. I have to get some medicine for my grandfather. I don't know my way around here very well yet."

Jane pulled herself together and managed to give the required directions without very much stammering, and without twisting her words beyond saying that the tailor was next to the "shoot bop" instead of the boot shop. Under the stranger's kindly tact she was even able to chat a little about the beauty of Wyanoke and the coldness of the bathing.

The trolley was late in arriving at Winchester, and Jane had just time to run to the station as the train came in and the passengers swarmed out on the platform. Bewildered by all the noise and confusion, she stood looking about her, searching with her eyes for her mother.

"Janey," cried a laughing voice at her elbow, and turning Jane threw herself into her mother's arms. "Oh, mother," she cried, "I

was afraid I was late—how well you look—and you've got a new hat!"

"I am well, dear. Do you like the hat? I felt it was time I had a new one," and with a rapturous squeeze of Jane's arm, Mrs. Gale went to plead with the baggageman to deliver her trunk as soon as possible. Baggage communications between Winchester and Wyanoke were always something of a matter of luck and the baggageman's whims.

As her mother talked with the man, Jane studied her, rather puzzled. The new little dark blue toque was very becoming and hid the gray hairs that of late had been showing in the soft brown hair; but more than that her mother seemed different to Jane, younger and gayer and a little excited. It had not occurred to Jane before that her mother was pretty.

"And now, Janey, I'm through. Let's hurry."

"What have you got to tell me?" asked Jane as they took their places in the trolley car.

Mrs. Gale threw her a startled glance, and smiled, while a faint color tinted her thin cheeks. "I'll tell you later, dear," she an-

swered with a little squeeze of Jane's hand. "First tell me all about what's happened at Buttercup Cottage—and how Cousin Willy is. Any new bargains yet?"

Jane frowned. If there was any news to hear she wanted it at once. Still frowning, she stared at the great arch of willow trees under which the car was passing. She hated mysteries—even little ones.

But her mother was in the midst of a lively account of some old friends she had met again after years, and in spite of herself Jane relaxed and listened, and listening forgot the mystery.

Their simple supper over, and Cousin Willy's friend from the hotel having come to call on her, Jane and her mother put on heavy sweaters and slipped out for an evening stroll. As they paused for a moment on the doorstep, while Jane told her mother about the wren, a great mastiff came bounding along the path and behind him arm in arm with the old gentleman she had seen and admired at the gate of her favorite cottage was her acquaintance of the trolley car.

She touched her mother to attract her atten-

tion. "See that pretty girl," she said softly. "I was talking to her to-day. That must be her grandfather. Her name is Margery Morris. But I think that I'll call them Goldilocks and the Bear."

(A most unjust title for amiable, courteous Mr. Morris, as Jane later came to know.)

"Goldilocks" caught sight of Jane and waved to her, and Jane waved back, delighted. "See, mother, see, isn't she attractive?"

"Yes," answered her mother, plainly not listening. "Come, Janey."

Hands clasped together, they followed the path leading away from the cottage and the village to Ambrose Cove. There by a huge boulder they paused to watch the waves breaking with a roar and up-flung spray against the outer points of the two rocky promontories that half enclosed the quiet waters of the cove and strip of beach.

"I am very happy, Janey," remarked Mrs. Gale.

"So am I," agreed Jane with another squeeze of her mother's arm. "Oh, isn't it perfect! Just look down there, mother. See how the outgoing tide has left the sand wet,

and see how it reflects the sunset. Think of our being able to come and look at it all summer! It's so wonderful to think that we have Buttercup Cottage, and that we are going to have the whole long summer together—just we two.”

“But, Janey,” began her mother hastily. “Suppose something—something even nicer than the cottage came—suppose ——”

“Mother,” cried Jane, “what was the news you had to tell me?”

Her mother hesitated. “I’m going to be married, Jane,” she said.

CHAPTER IV

“ THREE AWFUL BOYS ”

Two hours later Jane sat stiffly perched on the edge of her narrow cot bed staring unseeingly at the candle on the table across the room. The skies of her little world had fallen and crushed her.

Round and round, like a squirrel in a cage, her brain revolved. Wearily, she reviewed the conversation with her mother, seeking some comfort in it, and finding none.

In a few eager sentences Mrs. Gale had told of her engagement to Perry Watkins, the well-known scientist, who had formerly been an intimate friend and whom she had not seen for many years. He was the kindest and the best, and the dearest of men, the very dearest, Mrs. Gale had explained with glowing cheeks. Jane had frowned, and her mother had gone on hastily to say that Dr. Watkins was a widower

with three sons—boys who sadly needed a mother and who would welcome two sisters with open arms.

“They are such dear boys, Janey; you will find them real brothers, I know, and come to love them. And they do need a mother so! Little Andrew made my heart ache, he was so pathetically happy at the thought of having a ‘really-truly’ mother. Poor little lad, he looked rather neglected, and showed that he needed a woman’s interested care. And Perry and Jack are such splendid boys. Jack is a harum-scarum; but the oldest boy has inherited his father’s fine mind.”

Jane was silent, and her mother went on softly, “There doesn’t seem to be any reason for us to wait to be married. We knew each other so well years ago. We’re going to be married in August, and then we’ll all go to the old country place near the Berkshires. It’s a big roomy old house surrounded by elms, and a brook goes babbling through one side of the lawn.”

Jane was still silent, and Mrs. Gale talked on rapidly, a little frightened by the cold reserve of her usually sympathetic daughter.

“There will be motoring and horseback riding, and golf and tennis at the country-club—and there’s a lake not far away where there’s boating and swimming. Everything to make young people happy. The place has been rented for years—but this summer is going to be different.”

“What about Marion and me?” asked Jane coldly.

“Oh, you’ll be with us, Janey, of course. And isn’t it lovely, dear, Mr. Watkins is to send Marion to camp in the Maine mountains,—the doctor urges it. I have been so worried about her—her cough has hung on so long, and she does seem so frail. But the doctor thinks that a summer in a higher altitude may make all the difference. And, besides,—isn’t it fine?—she can be tutored at the camp all summer, and then in the winter she will have a final year of school, and after that go to college.”

“And is Marion—does Marion know that you—that you—that you are going to marry this—this man?”

“Why, of course, dear, Marion is so happy over it. And indeed, no one could help ad-

miring and loving Mr. Watkins. We all had dinner together in town one evening—I was sorry to have Marion and the boys know about—my—my marriage before you, dearie, but I wanted to tell you myself—and letters are such unsatisfactory things. But Marion, you see, has met him, and she says ——”

“ Oh, mother, mother, Marion’s allowed herself to be bought,” and with a wail Jane turned and ran toward the house.

Safe in her room she locked the door and sank down on the edge of the bed.

Once she got up and lighted the candle, wandered aimlessly around the room and returned to her perch on the edge of the bed. Through all the bewilderment and shock, the hurt feeling hammered in her brain that her mother expected her to be glad. *Glad?* And to welcome the fact of those three dreadful stepbrothers. Stepbrothers! The candle burned lower and lower, the night wind blew in through the open windows, cold and damp and salt. Below in the living-room she could hear her mother and Cousin Willy talking low and anxiously. The candle went out, and in the darkness Jane slipped hastily out of her

clothes, and tumbling into bed drew the covers over her head.

The sun was high and streaming into the room and a light sea wind shook the window curtains, when she woke the next morning. Jane lay still staring at the flapping curtains, dully conscious that her head ached and that something had happened to make her unhappy.

The deep bark of a mastiff and the voices of passers-by on their way to the bathing beach floated in at the window.

"Oh, grandpapa," came a girlish voice, somehow familiar, "isn't this the dearest little cottage? Won't Polly be crazy over it? Oh, won't it be a wonderful summer!"

In a flash Jane remembered.

Weak with sobbing, she raised her head at last. There were footsteps outside her door, and someone shook the handle.

"Open the door, Jane," ordered Cousin Willy.

Reluctantly she obeyed and Cousin Willy came in with a tray bearing Jane's favorite breakfast, hot chocolate, buttered toast and marmalade.

"There, dear, I've brought you up your

breakfast," said Cousin Willy, putting down the tray on a stand beside the bed. "Your mother and I had ours two hours ago. It's a wonderful day—you ought to be out and enjoying it. Such a pretty girl went by with a big mastiff a little while ago." She glanced at Jane standing straight and slim in a sort of despairing aloofness, and she sighed. "Is Jane going to be difficult?" her manner said so plainly that Jane ordinarily would have smiled.

Then seeing that the girl stood with one slim bare foot over the instep of the other for warmth, she ordered her back to bed, and as Jane obeyed put the tray on her knees. "Yes, it's a beautiful day," she went on, wandering to the window for inspiration in the task she had set herself.

"Jane," she said suddenly, coming back to the bed and perching on its edge, "you love your mother, don't you?"

Jane simply looked; Cousin Willy didn't need to be told that her mother was the most precious thing in life to her.

"And you wouldn't want to make her unhappy? Well, you are making her—miser-

able. And you are spoiling all the new-found joy that has come to her."

Jane caught her breath.

"And besides," Cousin Willy went on, tactlessly effacing the good impression she had made, "you're such a little goose. Why, think of what it all means to you! A stepfather who will do anything in the world for you—give you everything you want. And stepbrothers who will adore you. Why, most girls would be wild with happiness about it!"

With a cry Jane dropped back against the pillows. "Do you suppose those things count with me? That I'd give up mother for them? Why, I'd rather we would starve—if we were together!"

"Perhaps your mother wouldn't," said Cousin Willy drily, picking up the tray and going toward the door. "I'm sure she has toiled hard enough for you all these years, and that you're a very spoiled and ungrateful girl."

Jane burst into tears again.

Toward noon, she dressed and, weak and white, dragged herself down-stairs. Her mother, who had just come back from the village with a little basket of groceries on her arm,

was arranging a bowl of wild roses in the dining-room. She sighed as she caught sight of Jane's stricken face, but she made no comment.

"See what lovely roses I found this morning, Janey dear," she said, tenderly smoothing Jane's carelessly arranged hair back from her pale forehead. "Such a charming young girl was getting some too. I should have liked to have made a sketch of her with her white dress and blond hair, and the rose-bushes all about her. She reminded me of someone I used to know, too."

"Yes, I've seen her," answered Jane listlessly. "She's the girl I call Goldilocks."

"Luncheon is ready," announced Cousin Willy, and they sat down at the little round table drawn up by the open window that overlooked the rocky lawn and the bay beyond. Conversation at first was strained. When Mrs. Gale admired the new doilies that Jane had stenciled with buttercups, Jane's eyes filled with tears at the remembrance of how hard she had worked to make the cottage pretty for their summer together. And a casual inquiry on her mother's part as to whether lobsters were

hard to get, caused Jane to choke, for had she not planned that they were to have lobster salad every Sunday evening for supper? Finally Mrs. Gale, seeing that the discussion of home matters was accompanied by the danger of tears, turned the conversation.

“I hear that Elizabeth Marshall’s father-in-law has taken a cottage here. Do you remember Elizabeth, Willy? She married a Mr. Morris from New Jersey. At present she and her husband are on their way home from Japan—their daughter is with her grandfather here.”

Cousin Willy laughed. “Yes, I remember Elizabeth,” she said. “Bessie, she was then. All of you girls were younger than I, of course, and it was beneath me then to feel much interest in you—but I can still remember Elizabeth’s pranks. She was the most harum-scarum, mischievous child I ever knew.”

“And the most enthusiastic—and the most affectionate, too. She was an honorable little thing, in spite of her prankishness. Kate Endicott says the daughter is a good deal like her, very pretty—less irrepressible than her mother was, but with a good deal of force and

character. She gets the force from the Morrises, I imagine."

Jane listened idly, half interested that they should be speaking of the girl whose appearance had so attracted her. Then her eyes filled with tears again, as she asked herself how her mother could prattle on so carelessly about people when all the time the dark shadow of "that man" was hanging over them.

At sunset Jane and her mother took another walk on the rocks, and the subject of the marriage was again broached.

When they came back to the cottage Mrs. Gale's face was white and strained, and Jane was again in tears.

"I can't stand him, mother—I can't! I can't!"

"Oh, Janey, dear," her mother had answered despairingly, "you're breaking my heart!"

There was another sleepless night for Jane, with a heavy, unrefreshing slumber toward morning, and another long, woeful day to be lived through. Her mother, too, looked sad and tired, although her face brightened at the thick envelope Cousin Willy brought her from the post-office at noon, and with a happier ex-

pression she went out, carrying the letter with her, for a quiet hour on the rocks.

Cousin Willy had little to say to Jane, but that little was pointed. "I simply cannot understand you, Jane," she had cried. "Look at the different way in which Marion is acting! The trouble with you is that you're spoiled, thoroughly spoiled! I don't see how you can make other people so unhappy."

And Jane in the dreadful week that followed wondered miserably how other people could find it in their hearts to make *her* so unhappy. Her mother was as tender and gentle with her as ever, but Jane could not help seeing that she was hurt and sad. The old comradeship between them was gone; where once they would have gone for long walks or sketching trips together, or sat reading aloud under the pine-tree, Jane now wandered alone on the rocks, while her mother wrote long letters, or held interminable conversations in a low, anxious voice with Cousin Willy.

Jane, seeing her mother's hurt look, longed at times to throw herself in her arms and to cry that if only the cloud between them could be raised, she would accept any old man for a

stepfather—even if he were a mixture of Nero and George the Third. But the thought of her own disappointment over the summer she had planned, and the remembrance of the three stepbrothers she would have to accept would always send her back into her shell and she would be colder and even more silent than before.

“Jane,” said Cousin Willy one morning, “your step—er, Mr. Watkins is going to be here this afternoon. Now, do try, for your mother’s sake to pull yourself together and to meet him like a civilized human being. We all have to shut the savage that is in our nature back into the wigwam at times. Now for goodness sake, try to shut your savage up tight! And think of all the nice things that you are throwing away—why, those three stepbrothers would mean a lot to some girls.”

“But don’t you see,” cried Jane excitedly, her voice growing high and shrill, “that it is just because of those dreadful boys that I can’t stand it? Oh, it’s bad enough to have your own mother perfectly willing to give you up for some awful man—to throw you aside and not care for you any more—but it’s worse to

have her willing to throw you aside for three perfectly strange boys that have never been a thing to her! Why, she talked about them all the time at first—‘the boys need a mother so,’ she kept saying. She never seemed to think that her daughters need a mother, too. Just because of that awful man and those awful boys she wants to go away to some awful old country house that belongs to them and to give up this dear little cottage and everything!”

“You are being very absurd,” Cousin Willy said sharply. “Now do try to fix yourself up—your hair looks like an owl in the ivy. And try to behave yourself when Mr. Watkins comes. You might do it so as not to mortify your mother.”

At half-past two Jane heard a big luxurious automobile draw up at the gate, and a minute later a deep masculine voice booming in the little living-room below.

As the clock on her desk struck three, she turned from her looking-glass and with white lips and a grim smile walked slowly out of her room and down the stairway.

From the stairs she could see through the wide doorway into the living-room. She

stopped and crouching down gazed at the big handsome man sitting by the window. From him her eyes wandered to her mother, a new mother, pink-cheeked and gay, with the happy, excited little air she had worn the day she had come home. As she crouched there staring at the strange big man who had come into her life to alter it, her mother looked up and, catching sight of her, called happily:

“ Oh, Janey dear, come here! ”

But with a cry of pain, Jane had dashed through the open door and was running toward the rocks.

In a sheltered corner behind a great shoulder of rock, she stopped and, throwing herself down with her hands clasped about her ankles, laid her head on her drawn-up knees.

On the beach below a group of happy children played. Jane could hear them shouting as the waves came in around the sand fort they had built. On the opposite point of rocks half a dozen boys and girls were diving off into deeper water. She could see them standing one moment, ready, poised, the next forming an arc through the air; and then, a splash. Now and then the wind brought their voices,

happy young voices, punctuated with bursts of laughter. Above, the gulls wheeled and called, and down on the beach a tiny gray sandpiper flitted before the incoming waves. In all that happy scene of sea and sky and shore, Jane felt herself to be the only miserable and unhappy thing.

But in the sheltered corner the sun shone warm and comforting, the sea wind laid cool fingers on her heated forehead and soothed her aching nerves. Jane had slept little of late, and she was worn out with grief and rebellion. Gradually, the shouts of the children, the laughter of the divers, the calls of the birds, joined with the sound of the waves in a lullaby, and Jane drifted off to sleep.

In her dreams some one tender and compassionate seemed to come to her, to slip a cushion under her heavy head and to spread a cloak over her thinly clad shoulders; some one who kissed her and called her Janey.

When she woke her head was lying in her mother's lap, and her mother was bending over her. Jane stared sleepily up, wondering what had happened.

"Wake up, dear," her mother laughed.

“It’s supper time, and I want to talk to you.”

Jane yawned. “What is it?” she asked sleepily.

“Mr. Watkins was here this afternoon, as you know, dear. He has gone for a little while to see his sister-in-law who has a cottage here,—but he will be back before long. He—he quite understands how you feel. But he wants to see you—he once had a little girl who died, and he wants to try to be to you what he was to that other little daughter. And he understands how you feel about the boys—if you think that you cannot accept them as brothers, you need not, Jane. You needn’t even meet them for a long, long time. But he wants to see you this afternoon—besides, dear, he has been ordered abroad on an important mission, and we shall have to be married sooner than we expected. Come, Jane, come.”

But Jane only turned on her side and wept.

CHAPTER V

THE DANCE

“COUSIN WILLY—what do you suppose? I am going to a dance at the Yacht Club to-night!”

Cousin Willy looked up from the stocking she was darning. “Do you dance well enough?” she asked critically.

With a flounce of indignation, Jane dropped into a chair. “Oh, Cousin Willy,” she cried. “I do wish that you wouldn’t always make me feel so good-for-nothing and cheap! You know that dancing is the one thing I really do well—you know we had a dancing class every Friday afternoon at school!”

“That’s so,” agreed Cousin Willy placidly. “How does it happen that you are going to a dance?”

“I met Mrs. Collins, that stout woman who was a friend of Aunt Jane’s, on the steps of

the post-office—and she asked me to go. They're having a Fourth of July regatta and water-sports at the club to-day and it's to end up with a dance to-night. I don't want to go a bit," Jane finished wearily, "but I couldn't get out of it."

Cousin Willy glanced at Jane's pale face and put down her work. "What are you going to wear?" she asked.

"Oh, I don't know," answered Jane indifferently. "My white net, I suppose—it's all I've got."

"I think that it's lovely for you to go to the dance," Cousin Willy announced with sudden enthusiasm. "And I saw the sweetest little blue crepe dress one day at such a bargain, so I bought it and put it aside—I think that perhaps it will just fit you."

She bustled out of the room, and with one foot drawn up under her, Jane sat listlessly hunched up in a big chair. Her mother had left the week before to stay with the friend at whose house she had been when she met Mr. Watkins. She was to be married from there and sail for Europe toward the middle of the month. Jane's meeting with her stepfather

had been a brief and unsuccessful one, and she had steadfastly refused to see him again, or to meet, or even to mention, any of the others of her new connections. Marion had written, taking her to task for her attitude, and there had been a short and bitter correspondence between the two sisters. Finally it had been decided that Cousin Willy would give up her proposed trip to Canada and that she and Jane would stay on together at Buttercup Cottage. The strain and unhappiness and the grief at parting with her mother had nearly made the girl ill, and Cousin Willy had felt more anxiety than she cared to show.

“Here’s the dress, Jane,” she said, coming back with a little blue frock over her arm. “Try it on and see if it will do. I’m glad that you’re going out this evening—it will be good for you—you need more young people. Why, to-day’s the first time you’ve even gone to the post-office for an age. And it did worry your mother so to see you so pale and droopy.”

Jane stared out of the window with eyes that could see nothing for tears, and suffered herself to be put into the blue frock. It was more successful than some of Cousin Willy’s

bargains, and its soft color and picturesque cut were becoming.

“There—that will do very well—I’ll just take up the hem a little and fix this lace in the sleeve—and it will be very becoming. It was a very expensive dress—I just bought it because it was so much reduced; although, of course, I never wear blue. Hasn’t Mrs. Collins a son?”

“Yes—Barry. Aunt Jane always spoke of him as Snobby-boy, though, because he’s so funny and snobby. I’ve never met him but I know what he looks like—that little fat fellow with the sleek light hair and not much chin and high cheek bones,—you know, we often see him round. Can that lace come over this way more?”

“Yes, I’ll fix it. Now go and take a nap, or you won’t be fit to be seen.”

“All right—but I do wish I didn’t have to go. I know I won’t have a good time!—I’m nothing but old Plain Jane, anyway,” she finished to herself.

When she woke from a long nap in the steamer chair on the side porch, Jane felt more cheerful than she had since the day she heard of

her mother's marriage. Her sleep in the open air gave her a good color and it was a very pretty picture that the candles shone upon as she stood before the high old-fashioned bureau in her room and finished fastening the quaint high-waisted little blue dress that suited so well her fragile beauty.

"There," said Cousin Willy, as they heard Mrs. Collins opening the front gate, "I'm sure that you will look as well as anyone there."

Throwing her cape about her shoulders, Jane ran out to meet Mrs. Collins, a stout commonplace woman, whose good nature did something to make up for her lack of intelligence. As they started down the road to the village, Jane could see the club-house lights blazing from every window, and the long dark wharf running out into the bay outlined with Japanese lanterns, and she could hear rollicking dance music. With the eager seeking of youth for life and romance Jane's pulse quickened and she unconsciously hastened her footsteps until Mrs. Collins, puffing, suggested that there really was no need to hurry.

"I wonder if that Margery Morris will be here," Jane thought as they went up the club-

house steps. "I haven't seen her for an age."

The dance was for members, young, old, and in between; but at the end of the long, hot and exciting day only the young had energy enough left to dance. The older people were clustered in groups on the veranda; the men smoking and the women chatting idly together, repeating stray bits of gossip and watching, through the long windows, the dancers with more or less critical interest. Here and there in quiet corners the determined card-players had their quiet game of bridge.

When Mrs. Collins and Jane entered the dressing-room, they found a couple of tired and yawning women who lingered, their wraps on their arms, for a final word together. "Well, I'm going straight to my bed," declared one of them, backing toward the door. "I've been on my feet since half-past nine this morning, running this thing, and I certainly am tired—these French heels are the death of me. Mary is going to stay until the last horn blows, I suppose. She has had all her dances taken since yesterday. Oh, good-evening, Mrs. Collins."

She paused to speak to Mrs. Collins, gave a swift appraising glance at Jane, decided that she was not in her daughter's set, and nodded indifferently as Mrs. Collins mumbled Jane's name.

Flushing a little Jane handed her cloak to the maid and turned to the mirror. She found it monopolized by a pretty little hoyden a year or two older than herself, whose frock, where it had become torn, was being mended by her fat and fussy mother.

"Oh, mother, do hurry up," exclaimed the girl impatiently, jerking her shoulder. "It looks all right! I've got this dance engaged with that peachy friend of Katherine Endicott's—and I'm missing most of it." She broke away and with a whirl of skirts was out of the door.

Jane, leaning forward and touching with fingers that trembled a little the hair over her ears, found herself listening with a sudden dread to the music that had sounded so gay and so romantic before. It seemed to foretell something that would hurt her.

"Ready, Jane?" Mrs. Collins called from the door. "Mrs. Price says," she added as they

made their way through the crush in the corridor to the ballroom, "that a whole crowd of Yale boys who have been camping out over at Vinehaven came this morning for the races, and that her daughter and the other girls are having a wonderful time."

Jane scarcely heard her; the music had stopped and the dancers, laughing and talking, were surging out through the hall to the veranda and the lawn. With wide anxious eyes she was comparing her costume with the modish gowns about her. In the garish lights of the club-house, the little blue frock that had seemed so quaint and artistic in the candle-light of the cottage, suddenly appeared to her to be frumpish.

Mrs. Collins sailed across the ballroom floor and took her place along the opposite wall with a congenial group of stout and gossiping matrons. Jane sat down beside her and waited.

The music started again, a fox-trot that set her toes to tingling. The dancers came drifting back, and the floor grew thronged. Jane, watching, saw here and there the faces of several boys she remembered having met the sum-

mer before and who were evidently down from the city for the Fourth of July festivities. Would any of them recognize her, she wondered, and come for the next dance?

They danced on, apparently oblivious of the little figure in blue.

"Don't you dance?" asked one of Mrs. Collins' friends, turning to Jane.

Jane smiled, with a forced vivacity that had no relation to her usual rather slow smile. "Oh, yes," she said as composedly as she could. "I dove to lance."

"I beg pardon?"

Jane corrected herself. "I love to dance."

"So does my daughter. There she is—that girl in the pink dress. I used to love to dance too, when I was a girl—my card was always full and running over."

The music stopped and again the dancers surged out to the veranda and the lawn. With a little sigh of relief, Jane sat up and straightened her shoulders. Expectantly she watched the doorway; some more or less familiar figure might appear and come in to ask her for the next dance. She caught sight of Mrs. Collins' son bowing his sleek blond head before a

dashing girl in brilliant scarlet. "I wonder if I'll have to dance with him," she thought.

Another dance began and Jane bravely set herself to watching the revolving couples; a tolerant and amused smile on her lips as one who amiably looks on the gambols of frolicsome puppies. Another dance followed, a fast and furious fox-trot, and Jane, beating time with slippered feet that could not keep still, felt her tolerant smile grow set. "I feel like the boy during the long sermon," she thought, her sense of humor triumphing for the moment. "'I don't do nothin', an' I don't say nothin'—I jest set an' set an' set.'"

That dance ended and the stout matrons talking to Mrs. Collins dragged themselves to their feet and departed to the pillows for which their weary heads were so visibly pining. Mrs. Collins, roused to her responsibilities by their departure, turned to Jane.

"Dear me, Jane, aren't you dancing?" Catching sight of her son she beckoned. "There's Barry," she announced. "He'll dance with you."

Barry feigned not to see, and made a move toward the veranda. A pretty girl stopped

him, and introduced him to another girl, not quite so pretty. Jane saw him ask for dances, and with a little sense of satisfaction saw him refused, the girls holding up their full dance cards to him. As they left him, he turned and inadvertently caught his mother's eye. She beckoned commandingly. He hesitated, evidently wondering whether he dared brave his mother's displeasure and bolt. She beckoned again and unwillingly he made his way across the ballroom.

"Wha-d-y-want?" he demanded.

"This is Jane Gale, Barry, and she hasn't danced all evening. I do so want her to have a good time. I thought you—maybe——"

Jane laid a protesting hand on her arm. "Oh, no, Mrs. Collins," she said miserably. "I'd much rather not—I——"

Barry bowed. "I'm sorry," he said, "I have the next dance engaged." His mother looked at him. "But—er—I have the one after that," he added hastily. "May I have your card?"

Jane had no card.

"It's a card dance," Barry explained with a man of the world air, "er—I'll get you one."

He disappeared and did not return until the dance for which he had committed himself.

To Jane after her inactivity it was a delight to get out on the smooth, level floor with the orchestra playing her favorite one-step, to be whirled in and out among the other dancers, to be part of the whole merry dancing throng. At first she was unconscious of her partner, lost in the joy of dancing; but as she roused herself and tried politely to make conversation, she realized anew his indifference and condescension. Her shyness fell upon her, and she suddenly remembered Cousin Willy's warning, "Do you dance well enough?" Embarrassed, put out by her partner's manner, she missed the step. "Beg pardon," apologized Barry, perfunctorily. "We'd better try again."

They started off again, Barry holding her so that only the tips of her toes touched the floor and emphatically marking the time as though she were a clumsy child. They swung violently around a corner; Jane's feet flew out, and again she missed the step. Barry stopped, counted, one, two, three, and they started off again. Nervous, indignant, Jane was close to tears when she spied, standing in the doorway,

Mr. Burleigh, a middle-aged, popular bachelor who had been a friend of "Aunt Jane's" and who had known Mrs. Gale when she was a girl. As she passed him, Jane looked up at him, a glance so unconsciously wistful and beseeching that he held up his hand and motioned for the rest of the dance. Barry resigned her, and she fell into step with her new partner.

"Such a woebegone, imploring glance, Jane, I have never seen," he laughed as he skilfully avoided a lumbering couple and piloted her into a quieter corner. "I don't blame you—I wouldn't want to dance with that conceited young puppy either. Well, how goes it, little girl, are you having a good time this evening? I just dropped in for a moment to see how the dance was going."

Jane longed to throw herself on his mercy, to beg him to take her home, take her anywhere away from this dreadful ballroom.

"Oh, Mr. Burleigh, please," she began, when he went on:

"Well, Jane, I ought to be congratulating you on your stepfather—he's one of the finest men I have ever known, and he'll make your mother a very happy woman. It's hard on

you, of course, at first—the marriage of those closest to us always is. But you'll be the happier for it after while. What do you think of those stepbrothers of yours? Haven't met them yet? Well, that's too bad—they're attractive young chaps. They will spoil you to death—that's the only trouble."

The music stopped, and Jane parted with this partner almost as thankfully as she had done with her other.

The evening wore on and the floor grew more crowded. Jane, sitting beside Mrs. Collins, found herself almost resigned to her fate as a wall-flower. All that she asked was not to have to dance again with Barry Collins, or to hear Mr. Burleigh talk about her stepfather. Suddenly, through the crowd she caught sight of Margery Morris's blond curls and delicate profile. Margery was dancing with a tall, red-haired, wiry boy who had remarkably agile legs, and whose long upper lip, and turned-up nose seemed fairly to radiate fun. She seemed to find him highly amusing, and Jane watching her, so confident, so happy, so at ease, felt that she must almost belong to some different race of beings.

"Don't feel that you must sit by me, Jane," remarked Mrs. Collins, somewhat superfluously. "I want you to have a good time, you know."

"I—I like to watch," faltered Jane.

Margery and her partner danced past her again, and she knew that they spoke of her. "They're making fun of me because I'm a wall-flower," she thought bitterly. "But after all, what does just a dance matter, when I'm so unhappy, anyway?"

Out of her misery grew the sudden resolve to take up her art seriously, and to become a great portrait painter. To comfort herself she fell to dreaming of the days when she should be famous and when some of the boys here tonight, grown to be men, should come to her to have their portraits painted, and of the scorn with which she would dismiss them. When she was celebrated and rich and courted she would go abroad and be entertained at great English country houses and famous French chateaux. She saw herself, radiant in scarlet velvet, sweeping into an opera box, while from a humble place in the audience, Barry watched her, stunned.

“Don’t feel that you must stick by me, Jane,” Mrs. Collins’ voice brought her back from her dreams. Jane raised her eyes from her lap and her glance fell on Barry himself, dancing with a tall ungainly girl upon whom he would never have wasted his attentions had she not been reputed to be phenomenally rich. Barry at the best of times was not a graceful dancer; just now he was absurd. With his head apparently butted into his tall partner’s chest, he kicked his heels out wildly behind him, as he whirled his way down the ballroom floor. Jane, who always enjoyed the absurd, bit her lips as she watched him. Others were watching him too, and as Margery and her partner caught Jane’s glance they burst into peals of laughter and nodded as if to share the joke with her. The music ended once more and Jane leaned back; she felt comforted somehow by the little incident, and the friendly nod of the two young people made her feel less forlorn and friendless.

“Why, there’s Mrs. Endicott,” fluttered Mrs. Collins.

Jane looked up; crossing the floor toward them was the graceful, elegant woman she re-

membered having seen the day her mother's letter came, and hanging on her arm was Margery Morris.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Collins," smiled Mrs. Endicott, "and good-evening, Jane. This is Jane Gale, I know," she said as Jane looked up surprised. "I used to know your mother very well, dear, when she and I were about your age. And this is my young friend, Margery Morris, who is very anxious to meet you officially. She says that she has talked to you several times. Now, dear, I will sit here and talk to Mrs. Collins, while you two girls run off and have a good time."

Before she knew what happened, Jane found herself being piloted across the floor toward a long window that opened on to the veranda.

"I'm so glad that you're here to-night," chattered Margery volubly. "I haven't seen you around lately and I was afraid that you had gone away. I've got a million boys on my hands to-night. That's an exaggeration—I'm trying to learn not to exaggerate—I mean that I have got five boys to look after. Three friends of Perry's and Jack's—they're Mrs.

Endicott's nephews—came down for the day. There are few girls of our ages here to-night—they're all older. Katherine Endicott dances with our boys a little, but she scorns anything that isn't at least a college senior—schoolboys are beneath her! Boys," to a group of lads standing in a corner of the long veranda, "just see what I've brought you! This is Miss Gale."

Breathlessly, Jane murmured something as the boys crowded round her, and there were rapid introductions. She was too embarrassed and dazed to be conscious of the names that Margery announced, or even to reply when the biggest of the boys asked for the next dance.

"You know you owe me one," he laughed, "to prove that you've forgiven me for nearly running over you that day."

"That's not fair, Perry," interrupted the red-haired boy Jane had noticed dancing with Margery. "I was going to ask for this dance. That's the worst of these elder brothers, Miss Hale, they're always butting in."

Margery turned from the little group of boys about her and took command of the situation. "Jane will have to have a card, Jack—

give me a piece of paper, somebody," she ordered. "There," as a torn envelope was fished from the pocket of one of the boys, "this will do. Step up, children, and engage your dances."

"All right," acquiesced Jack, "second half of this first dance for me, Miss Hale."

"My name isn't Hale," protested Jane faintly, "it's Gale." But she was already being swept off for the first dance by Perry, and nobody heard her.

Once more Jane found herself on the ball-room floor. But this time was different! Her big, handsome, young partner neither appeared to be disdainful of quiet Jane, nor asked her distressing questions about her new stepfather and brothers. He danced easily and well, guiding her deftly around the crowded floor, and seemed content just to enjoy the music and the dancing without too much talking—which Jane deeply appreciated, as making conversation would have been too much for her.

When her partner handed her over to his brother she was apprehensive; of course this lively boy would say witty things and expect her to make clever answers. But Jack, she



“ I NEVER KNEW ANYBODY COULD HAVE SUCH A GOOD TIME ”

found, was quite capable of doing all the talking himself. His running fire of quips and jokes and ridiculous comments on the other dancers required no answer beyond the laughter with which Jane, who honestly thought him the most amusing person she had ever met, greeted his sallies. Finding that Jane danced well, he insisted on inventing new steps, and under his guidance they pranced and capered and flew, bounded and pirouetted with unflagging enthusiasm until the music stopped.

"I never knew that anybody could have such a good time," sighed Jane as she and Margery perched together on the veranda rail while the boys went to get them some ice-cream.

"Yes, isn't it fun?" cried Margery enthusiastically. "I'm so glad you're here, so that we can enjoy it together."

Jane looked at her as she sat with her face turned toward the sea, the moonlight streaming down on her curls and her filmy white dress and scarf, and she wondered whimsically if Margery were not some sort of little Christmas-tree fairy who had flown in and perched on the porch railing. From the conversation

of the other girls at school she knew how few girls so unselfishly share their dancing partners.

"There come the boys," said Margery. "Jack ahead with two plates of ice-cream. Did you ever see anybody so killing—especially when he dances?"

Delighted with Jane's skilful following of even his wildest inventions in dancing steps and her cordial appreciation of his jokes, Jack clamored for more dances as the music began again and was finally elbowed unceremoniously out of the way by his brother and another of the boys.

The evening grew more and more wonderful to Jane. She had known very few boys in her quiet life, and those few had unfortunately been of the Barry Collins order; boys who showed by their disconcertingly wandering eye and indifferent manner how they regarded a little mouse like Jane. But these new acquaintances, with their polite and natural manners and their evident intention to make themselves agreeable, were different and seemed to her nothing short of marvellous. Under the stimulus of their pleasant society, she blos-

somed forth, and with Margery at hand to help her, managed to laugh and talk as though she had never known what it meant to be timid and shy. Even when her tongue tripped her up and she twisted her words, she was only slightly embarrassed, and joined in the laughter as unconcernedly as the others when she found that she had been talking at length of the "boy trout scoop" instead of the boy scout troop.

"It seems to me we have the jolliest crowd here to-night," remarked Perry, as, attracted by the fun, other boys began to join them.

"We can't complain of lack of partners," laughed Margery, holding up a card black with names; "some of Katherine's young men have actually condescended to ask for dances. Jack, if this keeps on we will have to dress you up in one of Aunt Kate's gowns. You'd make such a sweet girl, and you could dance with the poor desolated youths that Jane is turning down."

As she spoke Margery waved her hand in the direction of Barry Collins, who perceiving that Jane had become suddenly popular and the center of a worth-while group had duly presented himself. Perhaps the crowning mo-

ment of the evening to Jane was when she was able to show him her full dance card.

At last the yawning musicians began to pack their instruments, and one by one the lights of the club-house were extinguished.

"Oh, dear, I'm so sorry it's over," cried Jane, her eyes shining and her cheeks still scarlet, as she went down the steps with Mrs. Collins. "I believe I could dance all night!"

"So could I," answered Jack. "Next time we'll do those fancy steps and give the others something to think about. Don't forget, Miss Hale."

"Her name isn't Hale, you boob," exclaimed his brother, as Jane and Mrs. Collins moved off. "It's Gale—Jane Gale!"

Jack stared at Perry in open-mouthed astonishment. "*That* Jane Gale!" he exclaimed. "Great Scott!"

CHAPTER VI

“OH YES, OF COURSE!”

“GRANDPAPA,” said Margery the morning after the dance, “that Gale girl is ever so nice—if you don’t mind, I think that after I’ve gotten off my letter to mamma—and one to Polly—I’ll walk down the road and see if she is about. Perhaps she might go with us this afternoon if we motor down to Vinehaven.”

Mr. Morris glanced up from his paper. “Hmm, yes,” he said absently. “Get it if you want it, child, and tell them to send the bill to me,” and resumed reading an absorbing article on the tariff.

Margery laughed. “You’re getting rash, grandpapa,” she teased. “Suppose I had wanted a steam yacht, instead of just one girl for an afternoon’s ride?”

“Um—what?—yes, dear,” answered her grandfather, still absorbed.

Smiling, Margery perched cross-legged on the wide stone ledge of the veranda balustrade, and spreading open her leather writing-case on her knee, began her letters. The sunshine fell on her uncovered head and the sea-wind stirred the little curls clustering about her face; now and then she paused in her writing to exult in the sunshine and salt air, or to enjoy the ruby red of the geraniums in the stone vases against the brilliant blue of the summer sky, and to listen to the gentle gluck-gluck of the waves on the rocks below.

“Oh, Polly,” she wrote, “I am so crazy for you and Esther to get here! This glorious air makes us feel so well, and everything is so perfect. We were ever so lucky in getting this cottage, too. It’s all white, and rambling, and flower-hidden outside, and all big rooms and low ceilings and funny nooks and queer artistic furniture inside. And the veranda sprawls right out over the rocks so that there’s a drop down into the bay and the vines from the flower-boxes hang down over the brown rocks. The veranda will be a perfect place for parties.”

Her letters finished, Margery ran up the

stairs to her room, where she paused to look out of her window across the sparkling blue water of the bay to the great sand-dunes. "Oh, it's going to be such a perfect summer," she exulted, as poor Jane had done. Her close friends, Polly Jameson and Esther Crowell, were to pay her a long visit, and Sam Bennet's family were going to be at a hotel in Winchester. To the delight of all the young people, Dick Ball's grandfather had actually consented to Dick's joining Sam and spending a month with him. And now that Perry and Jack had unexpectedly come to spend the summer with Mrs. Endicott, who was their own aunt and Margery's by adoption, the prospects for the summer seemed of the liveliest. Margery, too, had taken a fancy to Jane, and hoped that she would add one more to their number.

"I wonder who she is," she thought, crossing to the other window, where her newly whitened sports shoes were drying in the sunshine. "Her name seems familiar, somehow, and Aunt Kate seemed rather mysterious and queer about her. I wish I had had a chance last night to ask her about Jane—I'll do it when we go over there this evening."

She leaned far out of the window to watch a sailing vessel disappear into the horizon.

“How perfect it looks out there—doesn’t it, Sarah?” she remarked to the maid who had just come in with an armload of clean clothes. “Wouldn’t it be fun out there in a dear little sailboat, bobbing up and down over the waves!”

“Goodness, no, Miss Margery,” declared Sarah with a shudder. “It’s just thim horrid cruel waves that makes me stay awake at night thinkin’ about thim. Oh, it’s many a prayer I sez to the saints that we’ll all git home safely back to Renwyck’s Town. Don’t you try goin’ out in any of thim little boats!—it’s good an’ seasick ye’d be, anyway,” she comforted herself.

“Now, Sarah,” teased Margery, sitting down on the floor to change her shoes, “just think what a nice mermaid I’d be if I happened to get up-dumped out of one of those boats!”

“It’s ill jestin’ about serious matters, Miss Margery,” reproved Sarah. “If you’re goin’ out you might stop at that fishman’s and hustle him up. I asked him when he’d deliver thim clams I ordered fer lunch, an’ he said he’d do it

when he 'got round to it.' That's the way with all these here New England people—they're so independent, and they'll just do things whin they 'git round to it.' 'Round to it?' I sez to him. 'I'll git round to you if you don't have thim clams here by lunch time,' " and Sarah poked her broom under the bureau as though she were sweeping out the whole tribe of New England fish-dealers.

"Any other errands?" asked Margery as she put her letters into the pocket of her white linen skirt. "I'll be back by luncheon—maybe before," she added with a laugh, "in case this Jane Gale is cold to me."

Her letters dropped in the slot at the post-office, and a friendly chat with the postmistress indulged in, she stopped at the fishman's and impressed upon him Sarah's displeasure were the clams not forthcoming by lunch time. Then free, she turned her feet in the direction of Buttercup Cottage. The old village street with its little white houses and its big elms enchanted her, as did the cottage gardens. "Oh, won't Polly love it," she thought, "and as for mamma!—she'll be so enthusiastic she won't be able to speak." And Margery's face

grew radiant as she thought of the home-coming of the lovely young mother who had been far away in Japan for so many long months.

A yellow rose beckoned to her from the other side of a low white picket-fence. Margery, who loved roses, stopped and looked at it and at the little white house in the tiny dooryard of which it grew.

“That’s a beautiful rose,” she thought. “I wonder what it is called—and if it is as fragrant as it looks. We must get some like it at the White House farm.”

She looked up and down the street; nothing living was in sight except a solitary cat stalking across the street. Putting her hands on the fence she leaned far over and buried her nose in the golden heart of the flower.

“You there! What are you doing?” came a harsh voice above her head. Startled, Margery almost lost her balance and for an instant came close to pitching forward on her head. After what seemed to her an eternity she regained her feet and raised her crimson face to the upper window of the house where a severe, middle-aged woman stood watching her.

“You summer boarders are too fresh,” said

the woman angrily. "You stalk about the village as though you owned the whole place. But I can tell you, stealing my roses is going just about too far."

"I—I wasn't stealing your rose—I—I was just smelling it."

"That's very likely," snapped the woman.

Angry and embarrassed, Margery turned on her heel and went on her way, "stalking" like the boarders the woman had objected to. The cat trotted a foot or two ahead of her.

Suddenly the absurdity of the situation overcame her, and she burst out laughing so unexpectedly that the startled cat backed off and spat at her. With that she became limp with laughter and she was still smiling when she passed her grandfather's house and followed along the path that led to Buttercup Cottage.

"It's such a dear funny little place," she thought as she came near it. "Polly will love this, too. Oh, there's somebody sketching by the pine—I wonder if it's Jane. Oh dear," as she caught sight of a tall boy leaning over the low stone wall and heard him call something to the girl under the tree. "That's Jack."

Margery had no objections to Jack on gen-

eral principles; in fact, she considered him an altogether presentable and charming person, with the added advantage of being Mrs. Endicott's nephew; but she felt that the scatter-brained boy would be decidedly in the way when she was trying to engineer a better acquaintance with this shy girl.

Suddenly, Margery herself grew almost shy; and lingering by the wall, discovered that her shoe needed tying, retied it; watched a seagull and a distant sailboat, and at last was about to go on to the beach. At that moment Jack looked up, recognized her and waved. Margery waved back with desperate cordiality and called to Jane, "How are you after the dance?"

Jane did not understand, and Margery called again:

"How are you after the dance?"

Still Jane did not understand, and Margery, wishing that she had never undertaken to ask the question, screamed once more, "How are you after the dance?"

Jack came forward. "Better come in, Margery," he said, holding out his hand to help her over the wall. "We were just speaking of

your ladyship when you arrived on the scene."

Jane, confused, came forward, held out her hand, and abruptly drew it back. "I'm afraid that it's painty," she explained with a shy laugh. "I—I was just painting."

"Oh, how perfect," exclaimed Margery as her eyes fell on the sketch on the easel. "Did you do that? It's awfully nice and decorative, isn't it? I wish I could paint—I can't do a thing but sing and play a little. Polly Jame-son, the girl who is going to visit me later on, is terribly bright. But I'm afraid that we are interrupting you."

"I'm afraid that we are," agreed Jack, without evincing any compunction. "I came along and saw the painting fest going on—so I yelled and asked if I might come in."

Jane laughed again, shyly. "I'm very glad to see you both," she faltered.

"I had better luck here in looking over the fence than I did a little while ago," said Margery, seeing that Jane was embarrassed and kindly taking the burden of the conversation. "I was so mad!"

She went on with the story of her adventure

of the rose, and Margery, who never suffered from self-consciousness herself, was so funny in her indignation at the woman's rudeness that Jane and Jack thoroughly enjoyed it. Then Jack remembered a ridiculous adventure of his own, and Jane even added a shy story which she managed to tell without undue twisting of her words. Margery, sitting on the rock with her hands folded in her lap, glanced at Jane on her little camp-stool before the easel, her palette on her left arm, and at Jack stretched out beside her on the grass and thought what an attractive little group they made. "I wish that Polly were here to see them," she thought, her eyes admiringly on Jane's dark hair and her long blue painting smock. "She'd put them into a story."

"Hello," said a voice back of them. Certain that *his* presence could never be undesired, Barry Collins had not lingered by the wall waiting for a semi-invitation, but had opened the gate and come in. Having seen Jane so popular the night before he had felt that it might be worth his while to call this morning.

Jack raised his eyebrows and drew back with something of the air of a dog meeting another

strange and rather doubtful canine. He had not been impressed the night before by Barry. Margery felt frankly bored; she wanted to talk to this nice girl without a "whole lot of boys underfoot."

"I'm sorry, but I really must be going," she said, rising after Barry had regaled them with gossip of the night before: that Miss Brown's gown had been imported and had cost three hundred dollars and that Mr. Robinson had eaten six plates of ice-cream. "If I'm late for luncheon Sarah will have a worse opinion of me than she had of the fishman—and that's saying something. Sure you can't go with us this afternoon?"

Jack got up to accompany her. With her eyes, Jane implored them to stay and not leave her to the society of Barry, but Margery was firm.

"Isn't Jane sweet?" she remarked to Jack as they walked together down the path over the rocks. "I'm so sorry she can't go with grandpapa and me to Vinehaven this afternoon. Yes, she certainly is sweet."

Jack made a dive with his cap after a butterfly, missed it and almost fell. "Sure," he

agreed, restoring himself to the perpendicular. "Do you know who she is?" he added after a moment's silence.

"Why, yes, of course—her name is Gale—Jane Gale."

"Yes, but who else is she?"

"Why I don't know," answered Margery, surprised.

"Think," insisted Jack.

"Aunt Kate said her name is Jane—Jane Gale."

"You *are* slow," remarked Jack with flattering frankness. "Think a minute — Jane Gale!"

"Why? I don't see —— Oh! Oh, yes! Oh, of course! You mean she's that Mrs. Gale's daughter? I never thought! Of course—I might have known! Oh, Jack!"

CHAPTER VII

AT THE KOPPER-KETTLE

JANE was relieved when Barry took his departure and she could go on with her painting. But the light had changed and she found that her morning's enthusiasm for work had faded, so by and by her hands dropped into her lap and she sat dreaming.

"I wonder if that Margery Morris will let me paint her sometime," she thought. "I wish I could ask her. Think of me with two boys and a strange girl calling on me all in one morning! How mother and Marion would laugh."

Her eyes filled with tears as she thought of her mother, and she could scarcely see her painting things as she gathered them together and went into the house.

"Who was that out there with you?" asked Cousin Willy. "I thought I saw Barry Collins."

“Yes, he was here, and that Margery Morris I told you about meeting at the dance last night—that pretty girl. And then there was a boy I met last night too—I didn’t catch his name. There were such a lot of boys and I got them all mixed up. Anyway, he said his aunt, Mrs. Endicott, has a cottage here for the summer. So I suppose he’ll be here for some time.”

Cousin Willy looked surprised. “A nephew of Mrs. Endicott’s?” she repeated. “Why!” She stopped abruptly, suddenly absorbed in capturing a big fly that buzzed about the window. “Are you going to the class to-day?”

“Yes—this afternoon. Margery Morris wanted me to go motoring, but of course I couldn’t.”

“You can have that big blue hat I bought at Marshall’s. It will suit you better than it does me—I only bought it because it was reduced, anyway.”

When she tried it on that afternoon and started off for Winchester, Jane secretly thought that the big girlish hat did suit her better than it did Cousin Willy. Its artistic lines and vivid color were very becoming to

Jane and she felt quite pleased with her appearance as she stood waiting for the car under the big elm by the old Civil War veteran's tiny shop. In spite of herself she felt rather interested in life; Margery and Jack seemed to suggest pleasant possibilities, and they had taken her thoughts from herself and her unhappiness.

Just as the car came in sight Mrs. Collins came puffing up the hill. She was quite spent for breath and Jane and the conductor had to help her aboard.

"Well, Jane!" she panted as soon as she was able to speak. "I—haven't seen—you—since—the dance last night. Hope you enjoyed—yourself. Dear me, I oughtn't—to attempt to run—up the hill at my age. It's bad for the heart!"

Jane murmured something inarticulate and sympathetic, and Mrs. Collins panted on. "It was all—that stupid Lizzie's fault. I said to her, 'Lizzie, I'm going to take a little nap—call me at half-past two,' and she said, 'Yes, ma'am.' And then, she didn't call me until twenty-five minutes of three! Really, she deserves to lose her place! Well, Jane, Barry

tells me you and your stepbrothers are great friends already. He says he met one of them at your house this morning."

"My stepbrothers?"

"Yes, your stepbrothers."

"But, my stepbrothers? Why? How?" asked Jane, still looking blank.

"Yes, your stepbrothers, the Watkins boys. Barry said he met Jack Watkins at your house this morning. He said it was a funny thing, too, but he didn't know that they were your stepbrothers until after he had left you. Somebody told him at the post-office."

Jane put out her hand blindly, and touched Mrs. Collins. "My stepbrothers," she repeated vaguely.

"Why, yes, Jane," replied Mrs. Collins, rather impatiently, "your stepbrothers. What's the matter?—you look so funny. I suppose it isn't a very pleasant subject to you—talking about your mother's marriage, but I'm glad to see you taking it so sensibly and making friends with your steps. Barry seems to be quite taken with that Morris girl—she's some connection of Mrs. Endicott, I think. I'll have to have you all over some

evening for a little party. I like to entertain for Barry's friends. I'm not like some mothers—glad to have their sons out of the house."

Mrs. Collins rambled on, beginning every sentence with the words "I" or "Barry," while Jane sat silent, absorbed in her own affairs. She felt desperately that she must conceal her amazement over the facts that Mrs. Collins had just disclosed. If she did not it would be repeated to Barry, she knew, and Barry would find it social capital and tell it as an amusing story everywhere in Wyanoke.

But underneath the calm manner with which she apparently listened to Mrs. Collins, Jane was hurt and angry. Her young dignity resented bitterly what she considered the intrusiveness of her stepbrothers. "They know how I feel about them," she thought indignantly. "And the idea of their coming to Wyanoke this way! It shows that they haven't a particle of delicacy or sensitiveness."

Beyond her indignation she had the illogical—but perhaps not unnatural—feeling that the boys, in proving to be her stepbrothers—had cheated her out of the prospect

of a delightful friendship. She had known so few boys in her quiet life; and these well-bred pleasant boys had been something of a revelation to her. And now to think that Perry with his dark good looks, and lively and amusing Jack were her detested stepbrothers!

The model was posed and the class had begun when Jane arrived, her eyes wide and dark and her face white. The instructor glanced at her keenly, as without replying to the smile and nod of the gray-haired woman beside her, she tore off the big blue hat, and tossing it to the ground began with trembling fingers to open up her painting-box. The class was rather evenly divided; part of it middle-aged, somewhat inefficient, workers who added interest to themselves in their summer outings by joining an art class and playing at painting, and the rest a few really talented boys and girls, students in the winter at the various art schools of the big cities. Jane, who did not belong to either group, usually selected a place beside some one of the middle-aged ladies as being the most soothing. Mr. Hodge, the instructor of the class, a tall thin nervous man, an artist to his finger tips, bore with the good ladies with

a mixture of ironic patience and frantic despair, and found his consolation in the talented minority. Jane, although her work did not please him, aroused his interest in her appealing personality, and he gave her a good deal of his attention, more so in fact than some of the more talented pupils thought to be quite fair. To-day, seeing that she was overwrought, he did not go near her easel, although from a distance he glanced rather quizzically at the few chicken tracks that he could see she had drawn with charcoal on her canvas. Unconscious that she was being watched, Jane let her hands fall listlessly into her lap with her favorite gesture when weary or out of sorts, and sat staring at the model with eyes that saw nothing. Those awful boys, ran her thoughts, to follow her to Wyanoke, and to finish spoiling her already ruined summer!

The woman next to Jane leaned over. "Let's see what you are doing," she said affably. "It's always so interesting to see other people's work."

Jane looked at her vaguely.

"Why, you've done nothing," the other exclaimed. "Mr. Hodge won't like that!"

Her pale cheeks suddenly flushing scarlet, Jane made a lunge at her hat, and jammed it on the wrong way about. With a murmured "I'm not feeling well," she bundled her painting things back into their box, and before anyone realized quite what had happened, she had fled.

Out in the quaint old narrow streets of Winchester she wandered aimlessly about; hating, on account of the explanations she would have to make to Cousin Willy, to go back to Wyanoke before the usual time. Now and then passers-by, noting her hat so plainly on the wrong way about, and her intense expression, glanced at her with amusement or curiosity. But Jane, absorbed in her own thoughts, was unconscious.

At last, remembering that she had promised to stop at the "Kopper-Kettle," the little tea-house near the trolley terminus, and buy some cake for supper, she decided to fill in the time there. She would order a cup of tea, or an ice perhaps, and linger over it as long as possible.

She entered the tea-room and went to the little glass case where the cakes were displayed.

There was no one about, and after Jane had walked heavily up and down the little shop, coughed so loudly that her throat rebelled, and rattled the sugar shaker lying on the counter, she decided to go down the long passageway that led to the enclosed porch looking out on the sea, where the tables were set. She thought that she heard voices there. The vine-sheltered porch, a pretty place with its white tables and chairs and the copper bowls filled with early nasturtiums, had grown to be popular and it seemed to be very crowded to Jane as she shyly slipped into a chair in a corner and looked about for a waitress.

“ Oh, Jane,” cried a gay young voice, “ won’t you come and have tea with us? ”

Jane started and turned. Margery, seated with a group at the next table, was smiling and beckoning.

“ Do come,” cried Margery again.

Jane half rose; then her confused glance fell on the others of the group. There was Jack smiling at her, and his brother Perry, and beside them, pretty Katherine Endicott.

“ Oh,” Jane gasped. “ Oh! ” and springing

to her feet she fled from the porch as she had already done from the art class.

The screen door banged behind her, and the little group by the tea-table stared at one another in bewilderment.

"Why," cried Margery indignantly. "She cut me dead! I ——" she stopped, her cheeks crimson.

Jack clasped his red head in a dramatic portrayal of grief. "Bejabbers!" he cried. "And I called on the lady this very morning and thought that I had made such a hit! Blighted! Blighted! Me fond hopes is blighted!"

"Shut up, Jack," ordered his brother sternly, conscious of the interested glances of some of the other visitors to the tea-house. "It isn't you, Margery," he went on quietly. "I'm sure that she has nothing against you. It's probably Jack and me. She objects to us even worse than she does to father. You see, Margery, we've been keeping it dark—but you're practically so much one of the family that we may as well tell you—father was particularly anxious that we should be here this summer with Aunt Kate because of Jane. He

thought that perhaps if we got to know her casually and naturally, some of her feeling against us might wear off. And we were to try to win the lady over, so to speak. It was through Jane's mother that Aunt Kate heard of Wyanoke, and everything seemed to fit in well with the plan.

"But bother the girl—why can't she take the thing sensibly? It's just as hard on us to have father marry again as it is for her to have her mother marry. But we can't help it, and the only thing to do is to make the best of it."

"But Perry," said Margery, "she was all right at the dance—why, she danced lots with you and Jack. You know she did! And she was perfectly polite to Jack this morning."

"Partners at a dance aren't to be despised—even if they are stepbrothers," remarked Katherine. "And I suppose she really couldn't be rude to Jack in her own house. But personally," dropping a lump of sugar into her tea, "I can't quite see that my new step-cousin is worth the bothering about. It seems to me that it is very bad taste to make things so unpleasant."

Margery absently selected a cake, too ab-

sorbed to notice that she had picked out one covered with caraway seeds. "Sometimes it is awfully hard to see things straight. I remember when I simply couldn't see it straight about coming East to grandpapa. Jane seems awfully sweet to me—perhaps after a while she will get to feeling better and come to her senses."

"It's to be hoped so," commented Perry.

"And you know, really, Perry," Margery went on, "I do feel sorry for Jane. It is hard for her to have her mother get married so suddenly. Aunt Kate said that everybody else knew that Mrs. Gale was to be married before Jane did—Jack and you and everybody."

"That was because Mrs. Gale wanted to break the news to Jane herself," explained Katherine. "She was afraid to write it to her—knowing how easily upset Jane is."

"Well, anyway," persisted Margery, "it is hard on Jane—everybody says she was so happy over the little cottage and had made so many plans about what she and her mother were going to do. I really feel sorry for Jane."

“So do I,” admitted Katherine. “But she needn’t take it out so on the boys and all her new relations. And she might have gone to her mother’s wedding—look at the different way Marion has acted—and not made everybody so unhappy all round.”

“Yes,” Margery agreed, “she has acted like a little goose. But perhaps it might have been easier for her if it had all come slower. And, of course, she couldn’t know how nice the boys are—some stepbrothers are perfectly horrid.”

“Let’s form a society for the coercion of Jane,” suggested Jack, “and force her into loving her steps in spite of herself.”

Margery demurred. “No,” she said seriously, “we mustn’t do that. She’ll have to do whatever she does of her own free will. It doesn’t do to play providence in other people’s lives—I’ve had enough experience of that,” she finished wisely.

Jack looked at Margery and grinned. “Listen to the words of wisdom from our grandmother,” he teased.

Margery flushed to the brim of her big white hat, and Perry kicked at his brother under the table. “Shut up, you fish,” he ordered.

“You kicked me instead of Jack,” said Margery with a laugh. “But as to my words of wisdom, Jack—the burnt child dreads the fire. I’ve got myself into too many scrapes trying to manage other people’s business for them. Dick Ball, one of the Renwyck’s Town boys, says that I have the greatest genius for getting into scrapes that he ever saw. No—what I feel about Jane is this—all that we can do to help is just to be very nice and kind—and then to leave the rest to time and Jane.”

Katherine looked at her approvingly. “You’re a good little soul, Margie,” she said. “And I used to think you were the worst spoiled little scamp I ever saw, too. Have some more cakes, anybody?”

“I wonder what Jane is thinking of now,” remarked Margery, pensively biting into a macaroon. “I wonder if she feels sorry.”

She would have been amused if she had known that Jane at that very moment was staring tragically at her reflection in the mirror of a drug-store window, and saying to herself:

“I might be able to stand it if only my hat had not been turned around!”

CHAPTER VIII

“ I’M SO GLAD YOU’RE GOING ”

THE morning after the meeting in the tea-house, Jane took her sketch-box out to the pine-tree. She felt restless and unhappy. With wistful eyes she glanced across the bay; if only she could hire old Simon Perkins to row her over to the sand-dunes where, hidden in some sheltered corner, she could paint in peace. She longed for the little dancing waves, the white-winged sailboats sweeping past, the exciting landing on the wet and slippery rocks at the bay side of the dunes, and then the great lonely spaciousness of the huge piles of sand. But Cousin Willy had gone to Winchester, and as the fishman and laundryman were both liable to call and present their bills that morning, Jane must be at hand. So turning her back on the tempting bay, she began a sketch of the little cottage.

As she worked her thoughts drifted off into day-dreams. Her drawing and painting had always been more of an amusement than a possible career; it had filled up many lonely hours for her when her mother and Marion were away at work. Not until the night of the dance had she ever thought of using it except as an aid to the interior decorating she sometimes thought of taking up when she was through school and must select some means of supporting herself. To-day, feeling sensitive and out-of-sorts, and, away down in her heart, ashamed of the way she had acted at the tea-house the day before, she toyed with the soothing dreams of becoming rich and famous through her art.

The little cottage faded from her sight, and she saw herself a famous artist, sweeping down the staircase of some baronial castle. She would wear white, she decided, letting her hands drop idle in her lap, gleaming white satin that would fall about her in soft trailing folds. Save for a great feather fan of blazing scarlet she would not have a touch of color, and not a jewel, except the pearl pins that would fasten the coils of dark hair piled on top of her

head. And, as slowly, with regal grace, she would sweep down the great stairway, the dancing would stop, and people gazing at her in wonder would say, "Who is that?" And then someone would answer, "That's Miss Gale, the great artist." And then ——

A horn tooted at the gate, and Jane came back from baronial halls to pay the fishman.

"I met the other lady down street," said the man, "an' she ordered this here bass—git a pan fer it, won't ye?"

Finding no other pan available, Jane brought out the dishpan, and was just hurrying her fishy burden into the house when Perry Watkins appeared at the gate.

"Oh, Miss Gale," he called, "are you busy? May I see you for a moment?"

Startled, Jane said confusedly, "Yes, no—yes," and sank down on one of the benches of the little front portico, the dishpan on her lap. Perry took the opposite bench.

"I—well—I," Perry began, finding the real Jane, armed with a dishpan and a fish, far more formidable than the soft-eyed girl of the imaginary interview he had been rehearsing

ever since the afternoon before. "I—well," he took a long breath, "I came to talk things over. You see, we are all going to be here this summer together—and I can tell you, we boys have been at school and camps so long that it seems fine to have a real home and somebody to mother us the way we have with Aunt Kate here. She's been in California so long that we haven't had her often before."

He paused.

"Yes," faltered Jane, casting a longing glance at the door.

"And I believe that you are to be here this summer," Perry went on hastily. "Now, it seems to me to be rather a shame for us not to be good friends. No matter how we may feel about our parents marrying, we can be friends. There is going to be a crowd of us here this summer. Margery Morris is going to have a lot of people visiting her, and we can have a fine time."

Jane found her voice. "But I don't care for just a good time!" she cried.

"Of course not," agreed Perry hastily, wishing that she would put down that dishpan; it disconcerted him.

“Oh, don’t you see?” Jane burst out despairingly. “My mother was everything in life to me—and now you and your father have taken her away from me?”

“I didn’t do it! It’s just as hard on me to have to give up my father!”

“It couldn’t be. A boy’s father never means as much to him as a girl’s mother does to her.”

“Not on your life!” Perry was emphatic. “I don’t believe that anybody could be more to anyone than my father has been to me. Why, the fun we’ve had together! Going on hunting trips and hikes, and last summer we went to Europe together. But the way I look at the thing is this—Dad has had a pretty hard life—you see when he was a young man he wanted to be an artist, but his father died and he had to turn in and support his mother and sisters. So he went into business. After a while he hit on his patents and made his money, and then he went back to college and did all the special scientific work that people make such a fuss about—but it was a hard uphill struggle for a time for him. So now if he thinks that he will be happier for marrying

your mother I think that the least we boys can do is to step aside."

Jane was not unmoved by this long speech, but she sat silent, staring at the fish on her lap.

"I beg your pardon," said Perry suddenly, and rising he grasped the dishpan by its handles and put it down on the doorstep. "That fish thing was getting me rattled. And your mother hasn't had such an easy time either," he went on. "Anyway, that's how your sister feels about it."

Jane struggled to control her quivering lips. "Marion sold her birthright for a mess of pottage," she quavered.

Perry, in terror of a storm of tears, hastily changed the subject. "Well, anyway, we're all here together this summer," he said cheerfully, "and it does seem as though we might have a good time. And I don't mind telling you that we boys have a kind of feeling—a sort of half-formed wish—that we really could be like brothers and sister. You see there aren't any girls in the family, except my cousin Katherine, and she's older and goes in for society and all that sort of thing. So come on, let's eat, drink and be merry, even if to-morrow we

die—or even if our giddy young parents have gone and gotten married.”

“But,” cried Jane, trying to make her position clear, “I don’t want to have a good time—I wouldn’t trade my mother for a million good times! I don’t want to be *any* boys’ sister!”

Perry got slowly to his feet and stood, very handsome and big, looking down at her. “I’m sorry,” he said. “Well, as there doesn’t seem to be any more to say on the subject, I think I’d better go.”

He marched down the path and out the front gate. Jane picked up the dishpan from the step and started to go into the house. After all, she felt rather sorry for Perry; he too had lost by the marriage. Involuntarily, she turned and gazed after him. How good-looking he was in that woolly white sweater. As though conscious that she was looking at him, Perry stopped and looked back. Catching her glance, he smiled, and with a bound cleared the low stone wall and hurried toward her.

“Please, Jane,” he said meekly, although his blue eyes twinkled. “I’d make you such a nice brother.”

Jane hesitated. He *was* nice, she thought,

and after all he had done nothing; he hadn't married her mother! She wanted to tell him that she was willing to be friends, but she was overcome by her fatal shyness.

"I'm—I'm, why, yes, I ——" she stopped, speechless with confusion and emotion.

She tried again. At any rate she could tell him that she was glad he had come to see her and had talked things over.

"I'm so glad that you're going," she said.

"Thank you," answered Perry haughtily, and strode out of the gate and down the rocky path.

Jane stared after him in horror. Once more her treacherous tongue had betrayed her.

Recovering herself she ran to the gate and called after him: "I mean—oh, Perry!—I mean I am glad that you *came!*"

But Perry was already out of earshot.

CHAPTER IX

OLD WICKERWORK

LIMP with laughter, Margery and Perry leaned back in the dilapidated old buggy and regarded the hilarious group clustered about its shaky wheels.

“You can jeer if you want to,” declared Margery between gasps, “but I believe that you’re all green with envy!”

“Do you suppose it’s all right, dear?” asked Mrs. Endicott rather faintly. “The bottom might drop out of that old carriage at any moment.”

“If only it would,” sighed Margery rapturously.

The old livery-stable horse, raw-boned and dingy white, between the shafts of the still older buggy, tossed his scraggy neck to unsettle a fly perched there, and pawed languidly with one forefoot at the road.

"Really, Perry," insisted Katherine anxiously, "that old beast looks as though he'd never get there—and I've just got to have those lemonade glasses, you know! I wish you'd give it up and go in the trolley."

"Now, Katherine," declared Perry, "how anyone can cast doubts on such a handsome animal puzzles me. Don't you know a race-horse when you see one?"

Katherine laughed in spite of herself. "Oh Perry," she protested, "don't be so absurd."

"Never was more serious in my life. This *is* a race-horse—the famous Wickerwork. Used to do it in two-twenty."

He tightened the lines and pulled the old horse back from a refreshing meal of grass. "If we're going to get to Winchester and back before night, it strikes me that we had better start. Farewell, sweet Katherine," with a nod to his cousin, "we'll bring you back the finest glasses to be had for love or money."

He shook the lines and the horse moved off. Margery leaned out of the carriage to wave a farewell to Mrs. Endicott and her household.

"It would be a joke, wouldn't it, if the bottom of this old bus fell out?" she confided to

Perry as she settled back and took off her hat, uncomfortably wide for the narrow old-fashioned buggy.

Perry grinned and fingered the worn handle of the whip. "We might have borrowed your grandfather's car, but I thought that the style of this rig would appeal to you."

"It certainly does," laughed Margery.

"The old livery-stable man didn't know whether I was to be trusted with such a fine horse as this or not. Told me about twenty times that he had once been a race-horse, and to be sure to drive him with a loose rein."

Katherine Endicott was to give a small dance that evening to a group of her young friends who were part of a house-party at one of the resorts nearer the city, and finding a scarcity of glasses for the fruit punch had asked Perry and Margery to run over to Winchester to buy her some. As the car had already been dispatched to Vinehaven to bring some of the young guests, Perry had hired the old buggy and horse from the livery stable, feeling that they would provide more of a lark than the commonplace trolley car.

"Wouldn't it be a joke if Jane should see

us," observed Margery. "She certainly would cut us to-day."

Perry's face darkened. "She'd have a little less use for her stepbrother than ever," he said wrathfully. "You might think that I had cooked up the whole scheme of father marrying her mother just to spite her."

"It's a shame," agreed Margery, knowing that the true peacemaker first allows the over-charged heart to unburden itself.

"It sure is," answered Perry grimly.

"But Perry," Margery went on, "Jane seems sweet to me. She's so gentle and old-fashioned, and pretty in a different sort of way from other girls. I suppose she's feeling all upset over things now, but after while she'll get over it. I've been through things when I felt terribly—but I got over them after a while. And I'm just going to keep on asking her to do things—even if she does refuse. Katherine told me to ask her to the dance to-night—I'm to buzz around and help make things go, you know. So when I saw Jane at the post-office I told her about it, and about all those older boys and girls coming and said I was terribly scared of them, and wouldn't she come and help

me out. She refused, but she couldn't help looking wistful. I don't believe she has had many friends of her own age. Anyone can see she's shy. And Perry, haven't you noticed the funny way she twists her words up when she is embarrassed? She called the chiffon fichu on my dress the other night a 'fishon chiffoo.' "

Perry laughed. "Yes, I noticed that."

"Later on," Margery went on, "when Polly Jameson and Esther Crowell visit me, I'm going to give lots of informal little parties, picnics and clambakes and things like that—I'm going to ask Jane to them all—and I believe that she'll be more normal after a while."

"Hmmm," said Perry, doubtfully.

The progress to Winchester was not a rapid one. Not only was the old horse slow beyond words, but Margery must climb out every now and then to pick some flower or berry growing by the roadside; now a great bunch of sweet red clover, here a tuft of golden ragwort, there a bit of bayberry.

Perry, although he pretended to grumble, did not really mind, for the road wound along through a pleasant country, with many a glimpse of the upper waters of the bay and

the wide river through the branches of the trees.

“Where do you suppose Jane keeps herself all day long?” asked Perry suddenly. “I don’t see her around like the other girls.”

“Oh, she is studying at the art class in Winchester. Aunt Kate and I were talking with Jane’s cousin yesterday, and she says that Jane has taken up art terribly seriously lately.”

“Hmmm,” said Perry again.

“Besides—I think she’s very shy and retiring. Aunt Kate told me her mother says she calls herself ‘Plain Jane,’ and thinks she’s awfully homely and unattractive.”

“Hmm. Well, here we are in Winchester, Margery, in spite of you and the horse. Who said we wouldn’t get here?”

They drove through the quiet streets and stopped at the furniture and pottery store where Perry got out.

“They are tying the things up,” he said, coming back a few minutes later. “The man will bring them out and put them in the carriage as soon as they are ready. If you don’t mind I’ll just cut down to the grocery and get those crackers and things Katherine wants.

It's on Water Street, and when they've brought out the glasses you can drive around there and meet me. Don't let yourself be run away with," he added as a piece of parting wit.

Perry disappeared and Margery settled back in the carriage to wait for the packages. The old horse bent his head and nibbled at the patch of grass between the curbstone and the pavement, and Margery turned her attention to the passers-by along the quiet elm-shaded street. There were a good many people, she noticed, and they all seemed to be going in one direction. Idly, she wondered what was going on.

The clerk brought out the packages and put them in the back of the carriage, and Margery, having persuaded the horse to relinquish his meal of grass, started down the street. As she neared the cross road that would take her through to Water Street, a man with a red flag came running forward and waved her back; they were blasting for a sewer.

Startled, and a little nervous, for she hated what she called "loud bangs," she stopped and looked up and down the street.

A kindly passer-by, seeing her anxious face and guessing from the way she held her reins

that she was not an experienced driver, stepped to the curb. "Looking for something, miss?" he asked.

"Is there another street that will take me out to Water Street?"

"You can go back to that driveway there." The man pointed with his thumb to a wide gateway in a tall wooden fence. "That'll take you into the old race-track grounds. They're having a Chautauqua meeting there this afternoon, but if you just go in that gateway and follow the track it will take you right around outside the big meeting tent to the other gateway on Water Street."

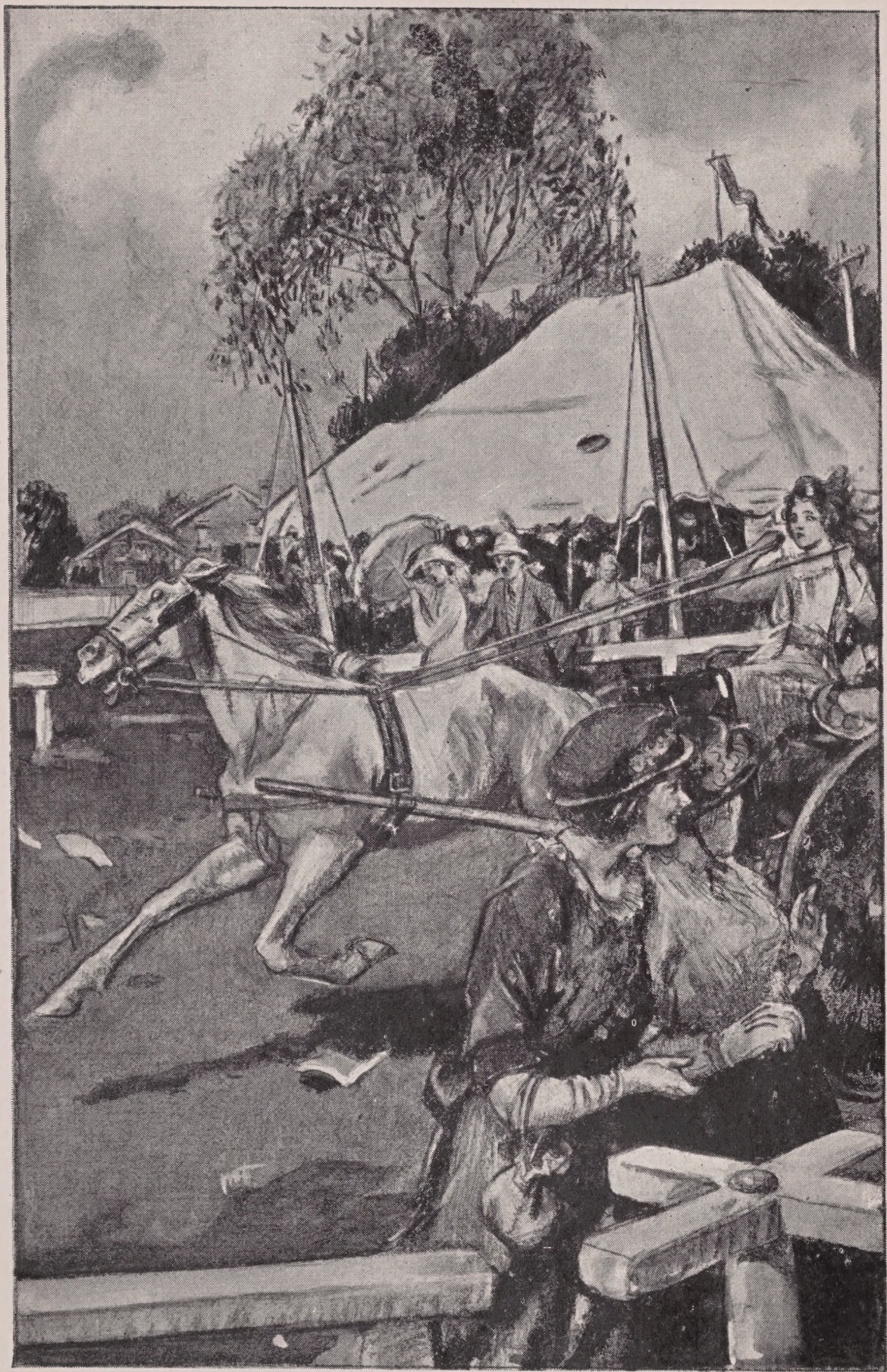
Margery thanked him, and carefully turning the buggy, a ticklish operation because of the high shaky wheels that threatened to lock and overturn the carriage, entered the tall gate.

"Tickets, miss," demanded the gatekeeper.

"I'm just going through to Water Street—they're blasting up the road there," explained Margery hastily.

"All right. Follow the track round the tent and it will bring you out to the other gate," and the man waved her on.

Margery's advent caused a ripple of interest



BUT THE FORMER RACE-HORSE PLUNGED ON

among the Chautauqua members who were arriving for a lecture on the "Self-made Men of America." The contrast between her forlorn equipage and her own dainty appearance was amusing. A small boy sang out, "Say, lady, this ain't no Noo York horse show!"

Embarrassed and amused, Margery drove on to the track, and hastily applied the broken whip to the back of her steed; to which he paid not the slightest attention.

"Oh, dear, this tent is big—it will take an age to get around it," she sighed, conscious of the amused spectators watching her from the tent, the side flaps of which were rolled up.

Crash! Bang!

The band started up a spirited march; and with a bound Wickerwork broke into a break-neck trot.

"Whoa! Whoa!" shrieked Margery, and pulled with all her strength on the reins.

But the former race-horse, once more on the familiar track, hearing again the music that had accompanied his youthful triumphs, and feeling the tight rein that of old had urged speed, kicked up his heels and plunged on.

"Gracious!" cried a group of women stand-

ing gossiping on the track and scattered—just in time.

Round and round, outside the tent, flew Wickerwork and Margery, the lemonade glasses rattling a mad dance.

“Stop her!” cried a woman, her voice lost in the noise of the band. “It’s a runaway!” But the rest of the audience, watching from the open tent, took the strange spectacle of the ramshackle vehicle and the pretty golden-haired girl as a vaudeville turn provided by a tactful Chautauqua management. “Guess she’s the singer coming to sing country songs,” shouted one man to another.

“This awful beast!” groaned Margery, hanging distractedly on to the reins. “Will he go on forever?”

The band stopped with another violent crash. Almost as suddenly as his mad dash had begun, the old horse fell into a slow walk.

The gate to Water Street being providentially near, Margery drove through and disappeared, to the no small disappointment of the children.

“Well,” declared the gatekeeper as she passed, “if that isn’t old Wickerwork! He

used to go round that very track in two-twenty."

Almost hysterical, Margery managed to guide her now thoroughly sedate steed to the grocery store, where she found Perry waiting for her, worried and annoyed.

"Well, Margery?" he exclaimed. "Whatever kept you?"

"Oh, Perry—don't—don't!" she gasped. "If you could have seen me!—oh, I shall die!"

It was some time before Perry could get a connected account of what had happened at the race-track ground. When he finally succeeded in piecing together the story he insisted that Margery must have a chocolate sundae to restore her.

"All right," agreed Margery, with a final chuckle, "if you'll promise not to tell Dick Ball when he comes about Wickerwork—I'll never hear the last of it if you do!"

As she stood on the steps of the tea-house waiting while Perry tied their steed—a sensible precaution in the light of Wickerwork's recent flighty behavior—she saw Jane and a fellow art student passing by. Margery stood ready to speak, but Jane's companion drew her atten-

tion to Perry bending over the hitching post. He was wearing the white flannels and the woolly white sweater that suited so well his dark coloring, and looked unusually handsome and manly.

“Who is that attractive boy, I wonder?” remarked Jane’s companion. “I’ve seen him around quite a lot lately—and I’d love to paint him.”

Margery started and involuntarily waited for the reply.

“Why—he’s my stepbrother,” said Jane, with unconscious pride.

CHAPTER X

SWIMMING

CLAD in her bathing-suit, Jane lingered by the gate. It was dreary going in bathing alone, and she wished that she had someone to accompany her. Even Cousin Willy would be better than nobody; but she was playing bridge at the hotel.

A red-haired, freckle-faced little boy came down the road muttering wrathfully to himself. "Mean old things," Jane heard him say.

"What's the matter?" she asked with sudden curiosity.

The child stopped and smiled at her, a wide smile which disclosed that several front teeth were missing. "Those mean old things back there," he began, his face darkening. "You know that house that has a sign on 'Come In'?"

"No," said Jane. "Oh, yes, I do," as she

recalled a row of rather pretentious little cottages that had been given names to match, "Bide-a-wee," and "Idlewild," and, the last one on the row, "Come In."

"Well, I thought they meant it—the sign *said* 'Come In,' so I went in. An' a woman found me there, an' made an awful fuss—mean old thing!—an' said she was going to go to my family about it, an' to get out right away! Mean old thing! I wasn't going to hurt her old house!"

Jane laughed, her heart warming to this sturdy, red-headed little boy, with his wide toothless grin. "'Come In' is just the name of the cottage," she explained. "I think that it's a very silly name, and that it serves them right for people to take them at their word. But won't you come in here?" putting her hand on the gate.

"Sure," said the child. "But wait a minute—here comes somebody I know. Whoeee! Whoeee!" he shouted, waving his hand to someone coming down the path.

It was Margery, very trim and graceful in her new black bathing suit, a black bathing cape floating out behind her in the wind.

"Hello, Jane," she smiled. "Hello, Andy boy," she added, stopping to pull the child's ear and to make a face at him that set him capering about her with shrieks of delight. "Do it again—do it again, Margie!"

"No thanks," she declined. "The wind might change and then my face would be stuck that way. Are you going in bathing now, Jane? Come along—I'm alone, although I think Katherine or somebody is probably down there. Isn't the water cold here! Scoot along, Andy, and get on your bathing suit."

As the little boy scampered off, Margery hesitated a moment. "Andy is—Andy is," she began. "Well, I suppose you know that he's little Andrew Watkins."

"Oh," said Jane blankly. She sighed, for she had been greatly taken by the little lad. She wished disconsolately that her stepbrothers were not so attractive in themselves.

"Come on," said Margery, interrupting her revery. "Let's hurry."

Her arm linked in Jane's, they ran laughing down over the rocks to the warm, sunshiny strip of sandy bathing beach. There Margery took off her cloak, and having weighted it down

with a stone, tucked her curls into a rubber bathing cap which she covered with a black silk handkerchief.

"There," she said, standing up. "I'm ready now—come on."

Hand in hand they ran across a wet and shining strip of sand and dashed into the cold water.

"I wish that I could swim well enough to go out there to the rocks and dive off into deep water the way the boys do," remarked Margery, as she stood up after a brief and warming swim.

"I wish that I could swim at all," returned Jane.

"Come on—I'll teach you. Oh, there's Katherine and Mary Benton."

Katherine and a handsome, dashing girl that Jane had often noticed joined them. Katherine smiled pleasantly and made some remark about the coldness of the water as Margery introduced them, but Mary Benton only vouchsafed an indifferent nod.

"Hello, Jack," she called, catching sight of Jack on the beach. "Come here!"

Obediently, Jack came leaping through the

water. Like most of the younger boys, he thought Mary Benton's off-hand manners delightful.

His cousin Katherine was not glad to see him, for she was afraid this meeting with Jane might prove embarrassing. "‘By the pricking of my thumbs,’" she said, trying to give him a warning glance, "‘something evil this way comes.’"

In answer he dived for her feet. She saved herself by throwing herself on her back and swimming violently, and Jack seized Jane's foot by mistake.

With a scream Jane lost her balance and fell. Jack rose to the surface and, very red and embarrassed, joined the others in helping her up. With a muttered, "I beg your pardon, I—I thought you were Katherine," he backed off, his ready assurance for once eclipsed.

"Come on," said Mary Benton, who was apt to grow bored when the attention was not centered on her. "It's stupid here. Come on, let's go out to the rocks and dive. Don't let's stay here like a lot of old grannies."

She was proud of her athleticism and of her

casual, slap-dash air, cultivating an elaborately "natural" manner, that was in reality more affected than the sigh-away graces of the most early Victorian of misses.

"Come on, Jack," she commanded. "Don't stand there like a sign-post, you poor fish, you."

"I'm going to stay here," said Margery quietly, "and try to teach Jane to swim. Bless his heart!—there's Andy on the beach in his bathing suit already."

Jack hesitated.

"Go along," said Margery, waving him off as though he had been a poodle dog. "Jane and I are going to swim."

Jane instantly decided to stay, and Mary Benton, not very well pleased, swam off with Katherine across the cove.

"Come on, Jane," said Margery, seizing Jane firmly by the back of her belt. "Now lie down and strike out. I won't let you sink! Go on."

Too embarrassed to protest, and made shyer by Jack's presence, Jane allowed herself to be suspended on the surface of the water by her waistband.

“Now strike out,” Margery ordered.
“One, two, three!”

Jane struck out and a second later struck bottom.

“Gracious,” cried Margery as she hauled her up. “I never thought that you would go down like that! Jack, you’ll have to help me hold her up. But, Jane, it’s very simple—you just pretend that you’re a frog. See, like this.” And Margery, who never suffered from self-consciousness, threw herself down on the water, and assumed one after the other all the exaggerated angles prescribed by the swimming-masters. “See,” she said, standing up and putting a hand on Jane’s belt. “It’s very easy—now just try to be a frog. Take hold on that side, Jack.”

Obediently, Jane tried to be a frog. “A very nice ladylike little frog,” declared Jack, who had found his voice again.

“Have confidence,” ordered Margery.

With a great despairing gulp of salt water, Jane had confidence, and again Jack and Margery had to fish her out from beneath the waves.

“Oh, *please!*” she cried as blind and gasp-

ing she found herself on her feet once more. "I'd rather not, I——"

"All right. You've had lesson enough for one day. But you're doing splendidly," Margery encouraged her, "and you'll learn soon. Come on, Jack, teach me that side stroke."

Jane retreated closer in shore where the happy children paddled about and with shouts of glee jumped the gentle breakers that broke against the strip of sandy shore. Farther out she could see Margery and Jack racing each other, and hear their shouts of laughter over Margery's attempts at fancy strokes, efforts that were usually more ambitious than successful.

"Hello," cried little Andrew Watkins, clutching at Jane's skirt. "Come, jump the waves with me."

It was possible to maintain a dignified aloofness with Perry, or even, although it was difficult, with Jack; but Jane found it impossible not to succumb to this friendly, snub-nosed little boy, and before she quite knew how it had happened, had hold of both his hands and was hopping up and down over the waves with him.

"See that," he pointed to a figure that dived

from the point of rocks into the sea. "That's my brother Perry. He can swim an' dive an' do everything. I'm going to be just like him when I grow up. An' that's my brother Jack," as another figure followed the first, and striking the water flat, disappeared with a mighty splash. "There comes Margery."

"Jack's deserted me," Margery laughed as she came up to them. "I think that I'll go in now, for I'm almost frozen. You'd better come too, Andy. You know Aunt Kate doesn't like you to stay in too long," she insisted as Andrew begged for "just ten minutes longer."

Each of the girls seizing one of his hands, they raced him through the water to the dry land, Andrew not knowing whether to take it as a tremendous lark or to be indignant over having his dip curtailed.

"There," said Margery as she wrapped her cloak about her and, taking off her cap, shook her curls loose. "Isn't it funny the way your hair always gets a little wet, no matter what kind of a rubber cap you wear?"

As they climbed the path leading up over the rocks Jane thought how pretty she looked with

the curls falling loose over her black cloak, and having seen how friendly she was, a resolve grew.

“Would you?” she began, “would you?—would you?”

“Would I what?”

“Would you?—would you?” Realizing that she would never get beyond those two words, Jane made another attempt. “There is going to be a competition for a scholarship in our cart lass—art class!—and I’d love to paint you for it. If you wouldn’t mind.”

Margery was frankly delighted. “I’d love to,” she said. “What shall I wear?”

Margery’s wardrobe was thoroughly discussed, and it was finally settled that she was to wear a certain favorite pale green gown and that the sittings were to commence the coming Monday morning.

“That will be fine,” Margery exclaimed. “On Saturday afternoon, my two great friends, Esther Crowell and Polly Jameson, who are coming to visit me, will get here. You won’t mind if I bring them, will you? They’re perfect dears—both of them, and they won’t disturb you a bit, I know. I’ll tell them

that they have to be as quiet as mice. Polly's always reading or writing, and Esther's always sewing—she's ever so clever with her fingers,—so that will keep them busy.”

“I—I,” faltered Jane, appalled at the prospect of two strange girls.

“I'm afraid that I couldn't come without them,” explained Margery. “You see, it wouldn't do for their hostess to run away and leave them.”

Jane pulled herself together. “I'd love to have them,” she said bravely. “It—it was just that the thought of two girls whom I don't know scared me.”

“I'll see that they don't make a bit of noise—or disturb you,” promised Margery. “Perhaps they can sit out on the portico. Come on, Andy,” she added with an amused glance at the little boy standing with the water dripping from the peak of wet red hair on his forehead on to his small upturned nose. “We mustn't let you take cold.”

“Well then—I'll expect you—be sure to come early.”

Andrew, feeling that Jane was neglecting him, and having no idea who she was, pushed

himself forward. "I'll tell you sumpin," he said, "sumpin awfully exciting. We've got a new mother and two new sisters. One of them is lovely, but the other sister is horrid and won't know us at all. I wish you'd make a big ugly picture of her."

CHAPTER XI

GUESTS

JANE opened the oven door and carefully drew out a large pan of gingerbread and a rice pudding. Very cautiously she set them down on the table by the vine-clad window, and brushing the hair from her heated forehead with the back of her hand, gravely inspected them.

“They do look good,” she said critically, breaking off a small corner of one of the loaves of gingerbread and tasting it. “I believe I’ve made a success this time.”

Jane, who was proud of her pretty little blue and white kitchen with its charming view of ocean and bay from the back door, loved to experiment there with the cook-book as guide.

“It would be such fun,” she had declared to

Cousin Willy that morning, "if only we ever happened to have the things the book always takes for granted—truffles, and apricot brandy, and anchovies, shallots and gum tragacanth."

As a rule Jane was successful in her attempts at cooking, although there had been an unforgettable pie that neither Cousin Willy nor Jane had been able to cut, a kettle of strawberry jam that had cooked itself to gum while Jane read poetry on the front porch, and the beautiful chocolate pudding that had been dusted with soda instead of powdered sugar. But this morning no unfortunate accident had occurred to mar the pudding or impair the gingerbread.

"There," said Jane as she spread a clean blue and white checked cloth on the table and turned the gingerbread out on it. "Now, I have only the potatoes to stuff, and then I can go up-stairs to finish dressing."

Her blue gingham apron hung on its nail behind the door. Jane ran up the stairs to her own little room, where she finished making the bed and straightened the things on the little table by the window. After a moment's anxious consideration before the looking-glass

she slipped on a soft blue smock over her white dress and tied a blue ribbon to match round her dark hair.

“This old white dress is so awfully childish,” she thought, “and the smock does look a little more grown-up and professional. Oh!—those two strange girls!” she added as she ran down the stairs. Half in dread, half in pleasant, excited anticipation, she bit her under lip and twitched her shoulder.

In the living-room Jane got out her easel and stood it in one corner. She had decided that she would pose Margery beside the vine-clad side window. Filling a big green bowl with daisies she placed it on the broad windowsill and set a little old-fashioned chair near. “Now,” she said, “everything’s ready,” and went to the panel mirror beside the fireplace to rearrange the blue ribbon that kept her soft hair from falling into her eyes.

“Prinking, prinking,” called a laughing voice from the open door, and Margery came in duly arrayed in the green gown and carrying a daisy-trimmed leghorn hat in case it might be needed. “The others will be here in a few minutes,” she explained. “I thought

I'd better come ahead and get started. But I told them how to get here."

Margery sat down in the chair and folded her hands in her lap with a do-or-die expression. She was resolved to be the very best of models.

"You needn't hold your breath," smiled Jane, after an interval of silence.

Margery gave a long sigh. "That's just what I was doing," she laughed. "No wonder my face was getting purple and my head was beginning to swim! I was so afraid that I might wiggle too much that I overdid it. By the way, Dick Ball and Sam Bennet, two of the Renwyck's Town boys who are staying at a hotel in Winchester, are with the girls. They won't stay long—they're going sailing with the Watkins boys."

Again Jane bit her lip, this time entirely in dread. "Two boys," she exclaimed. "Two strange boys?"

"Yes—Dick and Sam," answered Margery, cheerfully unconscious that there was anything terrorizing in the prospect of two strange boys. "They're both ever so nice. Sam's lots of fun—but Dick is awfully popular. You'll

like him too, I think—he wants to be an architect, and he draws very well, so you two can talk art.”

She sat back and was silent, and Jane went on with her work. As she blocked in Margery's charming outlines, a faint doubt assailed her. Had she been wise to make quite such an ambitious start? Would it not have been better to have had surer foundations before she launched out so publicly on a portrait of this girl who would expect her to do something worth while? She began to realize how little she knew. But fame and fortune and the gifts in their train beckoned to her persistently; she longed unutterably to achieve something that would make her completely free from her family and her new connections. Her mind was too firmly on her goal to consider the difficulties of the way to it.

Nevertheless, she sighed, and gripped her stick of charcoal so fiercely that she broke it.

“What's the matter?” asked Margery. “Aren't I behaving right?”

“You're doing perfectly,” answered Jane, and to keep herself from growing nervous fixed her mind firmly on the days to come when,

splendid in white satin, she should sweep through baronial halls.

Margery sighed in her turn. She was growing bored, and she wished that Jane would talk to her. Posing was not what she had thought it would be.

Gay voices came floating down the road.

"There they are," cried Margery with relief, jumping up.

"There they are," echoed Jane, also feeling a certain relief.

Margery ran to the door. "This way," she called. "Here we are—in here!"

A moment later the room seemed to Jane to be filled with boys and girls.

"This is Polly Jameson, Jane," said Margery, putting her hand on the arm of a tall girl in a tan sweater, "and this is Esther Crowell—and this Dick Ball—and Sam Bennet."

"How do you do?" murmured Jane shyly to the floor.

When she found courage to raise her eyes again she met the friendly gaze of the girl Margery had called Polly.

"I'm ever so glad to meet you," said Polly cordially. "Margery has been telling me

about you, and this duck of a cottage. Isn't Wyanoke the most perfect place? I know that we are going to have a glorious time!"

"Yes," chimed in Esther Crowell, "we're going to have a glorious time. And Margery was a dear to ask us."

"Adoring as usual, Esther," laughed Sam. "Whenever Esther has a few minutes to spare, Miss Gale, she puts in the time by remarking on what special model angels our esteemed friends Polly and Margery are."

Dick, the big boy whose blond head seemed to Jane's excited imagination almost to touch the ceiling, smiled and said nothing. That Margery should be admired was to him too much in the natural order of things to make a fuss over it.

Margery herself laughed and sat down again on the little rocking-chair. "Jane will be wishing we were at the bottom of the sea if we interrupt her work like this. So you won't be able to stay long."

"Yes'm," said Sam with ostentatious meekness. "We're going sailing with Perry in just a few minutes."

The others laughed and talked while Jane

sat mostly silent, too shy and too absorbed in watching her guests to find much to say. What manner of people were these, her wide eyes seemed to ask, who had invaded her little home?

Dick, she decided quickly, she liked; his bigness and his blondness appealed to her, and she liked his steady gray eyes and his pleasant smile. But he did not say much, and she felt rather in awe of him. Rosy-cheeked, round-faced, talkative Sam was far less terrorizing.

Esther, too, she reassured herself was not so frightening. Esther, like Sam, was round and rosy, although her hair and eyes were as dark as Sam's were light. She was sweet and dainty, and her little pink gingham frock was neatness and taste itself, but she did not have the style and air of either Margery or Polly. Jane found Esther somehow comforting.

She was both fascinated and scared by Polly—Polly seemed so vivid, so sure of herself, so easily cordial, so everything that Jane was not. Polly, she decided, was not exactly pretty with her rather long nose and square chin, but her face had character and charm and she carried herself unusually well.

Margery, noticing Jane's thoughtful expression, took it to mean that she was annoyed at having her work interrupted and promptly raised her eyebrows meaningly at Dick.

"What's the matter, Margery?" asked Dick, the usual feminine strategies having failed before the usual masculine obtusenesses. "What are you raising your eyebrows at me for?"

"Nothing," answered Margery, momentarily embarrassed.

Dick saw a light. "Oh," he said, "so it's time to go." He stood up and seizing Sam by the back of his collar, obligingly hauled him to his feet. "Come on,—it's time for us to go."

Sam, who was enjoying himself, demurred. "What's your hurry?"

A loud clear whistle from the road decided the question, and Dick and Sam went out to join the Watkins boys.

Quiet fell on the room again. Polly and Esther settled down; Polly with the "House of the Seven Gables," which she declared she was reading in preparation for the trip to old Salem, on which Margery must take them, and Esther with a diminutive pair of rompers for

her adored little brother Jimmie on which she was cross-stitching a strange monster she called a rabbit.

Jane turned again to her easel. As she worked her self-possession came back and she grew less uneasy. Perhaps she was going to enjoy painting Margery after all; at any rate there was going to be some kind of fun about it.

The time slipped past in the cool, pretty room, and Jane could scarcely believe her ears when Margery suddenly exclaimed, "Why, there come the boys! It must be nearly one o'clock."

Again the boys trooped in, and again the little room seemed to be overflowing with people. Jane felt shyder than even before and gazed more determinedly at the floor. Suddenly a voice sounded in her ear, and she realized that Dick was speaking to her.

"This is a jolly little old house," he said. "I noticed the doorway as I came in. Funny what a lot those old chaps knew about building, wasn't it? We have an old house at home."

Jane found her courage again. Perhaps Dick was not so terrifying after all. "Would

you like to see the dining-room?" she asked. "That's really the quaintest room in the house."

They crossed the narrow hall to the dining-room, and after Dick had duly admired the old fireplace and corner cupboard, it occurred to Jane to open the door into the kitchen. "This is old, too," she said. "And I love the view from the back door."

She had forgotten the gingerbread, but as she saw it spread out on the checkered cloth, and remembered the rice-pudding and stuffed potatoes, a thought came to her, which she dismissed as too rash and daring.

But it came back to her again when she and Dick had joined the others in the living-room, and when the others clustered about Dick and Margery to watch them experiment with Jane's Ouija board, she slipped out of the room and ran up-stairs.

"Do you suppose, Cousin Willy," she demanded, "that it would be very dreadful if I asked them to stay for luncheon? There's the rice pudding, you know, and, and ——" she paused, breathless, to wait for Cousin Willy's objections.

But for once Cousin Willy found nothing to condemn. "I think it would be fine. Don't worry about things to eat—there's plenty in the house. I'm glad for you to have some young people—you need young society."

Jane, missing the usual objections, felt it necessary to furnish some. "But Cousin Willy," she pointed out, "Margery is used to lots of servants, and having everything done perfectly. She wouldn't understand the way we do things. And I suppose the others live the same way."

"Don't be a snob," answered Cousin Willy briefly. "They'll have just as good a time as if you had a dozen butlers."

If Jane had any doubts of her guests enjoying it, they were speedily dispelled. Shy as she was Jane had the traditions of hospitality and she managed to make the boys and girls feel at home. Cousin Willy had been a belle in her youth and she still could be charming, and very amusing as well, when she chose to exert herself. To-day she did choose, and it was a happy, and somewhat hilarious group that finally rose from the lunch table.

"Oh, dear—I never laughed so much in my

life!" declared Margery faintly, helping herself up by the back of her chair. "Jane, we'll all have to go in bathing this afternoon to recuperate—the tide is high about three, isn't it?"

"The high is tied about four," corrected Jane, the problem of what to do with her guests next rising up to embarrass her.

They all laughed again.

"Let's wait until four, then," suggested Sam. "I'm too timid to trust myself in those cruel green waves unless the high is tied!"

Jane laughed with the rest. "My poor tongue!" she cried. "Now, let's go out on the portico."

"Oh, can't I help wash the dishes?" asked Margery. "It would be such fun! And really, I can do it very well. Do you know, I'm getting awfully hard up—and grandpapa says I *have* to stay within my allowance. But up here with the tea-house and everything, money just melts! Our old cook Kiley gets awfully cross if she has to wash the dishes, and Sarah has rheumatism in her hands, and Lizzie is on her vacation, so I thought I'd try to get grandpapa to let me wash up for a dollar a week."

"Behold Margery Morris, the great Dollar-a-Week-Dish-Washer!" cried Dick, at his favorite game of teasing Margery.

Jane flew to defend her favorite. "I'm sure she'd make a wonderful Dollar-a-Dish-Weak-Washer, or anything else she tried to be," she said warmly.

"You've spoken truly," answered Dick, while they all laughed. "A dollar a dish is just about what it would cost Mr. Morris. As it is Margery, she would probably wash those dishes with so much energy that there wouldn't be one left at the end of the week. So that part's wrong about her being a weak-washer."

"All right," said Margery tranquilly, too accustomed to Dick's teasing to pay any attention to it. "I'll be a Wallor-a-Week-Dish-Dasher, if that suits you any better."

Then she paused and looked grave. Through the open window she could see Perry and Jack strolling down the road, and catch the unconsciously wistful glances they cast at the home where all of their circle were welcome but themselves.

CHAPTER XII

“ALONG THE SALEM ROAD”

“OH, isn’t this fun!” cried Polly, leaning back luxuriously in the big touring car rolling along the beautiful North Shore, through pine-scented woods and past vistas of blue sea, toward Salem. “Did you ever see such woods—and such rocks—and, oh, Margery!—such cottages and gardens.”

Margery smiled and patted Polly’s knee. “It is nice, isn’t it?” she said. She was feeling very happy this beautiful summer morning. Never, she thought, had any girl been so happy, or had such wonderful friends—or such a good time! Ever since Polly and Esther and the boys had come up from Renwyck’s Town it had been one continuous round of fun; dancing in the evening in the big living-room of the cottage, or on warm evenings, on the wide veranda; swimming and canoeing or sailing, or tennis on Mrs. Endicott’s court. There

were a number of other young people in Wyanoke who had been glad to join such a jolly group, but as a rule the Endicott and Morris households preferred their own very congenial society.

This morning Mrs. Endicott and Katherine were taking them all to visit old Salem and its historic streets and buildings. Jane had been invited, but finding that her stepbrothers were going she had refused, although Margery had pointed out to her that as they were taking two cars, she would not have to be in the same automobile as the Watkins boys.

"If Bunnie and Mrs. Jameson were here," remarked Esther, leaning around Polly to speak to Margery, "it would be the same crowd in this car that went to Princeton on our famous trip."

Perry, who was driving, half turned round. "Who's Bunnie?" he inquired.

"My cousin," answered Dick. "She was visiting us last winter from the West. She went home just a few days before we came up here. She had her arms pretty badly burned about the first of June and it left her rather weak and homesick. If it hadn't been for

Margery, nobody knows what would have been the result—that day she got herself on fire.” He paused and looked grave.

“What happened?” asked Perry, but Dick went on with a teasing grin at Margery. “Oh, Margie has been quite a person in Renwyck’s Town! Sometime you ought to get her to tell you about the days when she first came and the excitement she raised.”

Margery laughed, then sighed and looked across a garden gay with brilliant phlox and tall snap-dragon to the blue waters of a little inlet. How complicated life had seemed at one time, she thought; how full of pitfalls that one couldn’t help tumbling into. And how simple it all seemed now!—just to float on the waves of happiness, to enjoy oneself and be happy, and have all one’s friends about one. Well, she had learned a lot about life and living, and Margery, in her comfortable corner of the big car, felt sorry for those—like Jane—who still had so much to learn.

“It’s too bad Jane isn’t here,” whispered Esther. “I think that she would have enjoyed it if she only would have come.”

Margery nodded. “Yes,” she whispered

back. "I think it's too bad—Jane could have a fine time if she only would."

"There it is—there's Salem! See, in the distance!" pointed out Perry, and a little later they drew into Salem by the quaint and winding highway from Marble Harbor, and were trundling along beautiful Lafayette Street and under the Derby elms, admiring the stately old houses, relics of the day when Salem was a great seaport town, home of the merchantmen that sailed round the world and brought back such wonderful cargoes.

"Which shall it be first—witches, or the House of the Seven Gables?" asked Mrs. Endicott as the two cars drew up side by side for a consultation.

"Oh, the House of the Seven Gables," cried Polly who had read and reread the book in preparation for her visit.

"The House," echoed the other girls.

They had no difficulty in finding the famous house, for they were waylaid by small boys who ran after them and climbed on the running-boards when the cars slowed up at a crossing. "Show you the House of the Seven Gables fer five cents!"

They found it in what was once the fashionable quarter of the town, now with the fine old houses turned into tenements, but still suggesting something of their ancient state. At the end of Turner Street it stood, an old, old house, surrounded by trees, with a view across the Salem harbor, lying still and sparkling in the sunshine of the summer morning, to Marblehead in the distance.

“Oh, isn’t it a lamb-chop?” sighed Polly happily, gazing up at the sharp-pointed gables of the ancient house, its gray, weather-beaten walls, and faded red chimneys, and the tiny casements sparkling in the sun.

“Polly—Polly!” laughed Mrs. Endicott. “How can you be so irreverent as to apply schoolgirl similes to this gloomy old home of romance.”

She put her hand on the latch of the tiny shop, and with a jangling of the shop-bell opened it.

Inside the tiny shop were souvenirs, toys and candies, and quaint gingerbread men, that the girls insisted on purchasing and eating then and there. Polly, perhaps, regretted that the lady behind the counter was so much younger

and more charming than Hepzibah of the story, but the others did not, and enjoyed having her show them over the old house, where Hawthorne had so often visited his strange recluse cousin, and which he had made the setting of his immortal book. Mrs. Endicott was particularly interested in the fine old furniture which, when the house had been restored, had been placed again in the stately old rooms, but the boys and girls were most delighted with the secret staircase.

“Oh, why don’t people have secret staircases in their houses now?” cried Margery. “Instead of having chutes for soiled clothes, and linen cupboards, and stupid things like that? Dick, I hope that when you’re an architect you’ll put a secret staircase in every house you build.”

“I like the House of the Seven Gables best of all,” remarked Esther after they had visited the witch house and Gallows Hill and some of the shops. “I don’t care much for witches—it seems dreadful to me,—all these witch souvenirs and things and the whole town making so much money out of the poor old woman it killed so unjustly ages ago.”

“ I think so, too,” agreed Sam.

“ But don’t you love some of the old houses? Wouldn’t you like to have lived in the old day when the great sailing vessels were coming here from India and China with their wonderful cargoes; all kinds of spices and ivories and silks and jewels and things? ” asked Polly wistfully.

In common with other romantic temperaments Polly was often homesick for the past.

They stopped to look at a large old house standing back in a garden and to admire the beauty of its Colonial doorway and its air of settled and serene dignity.

“ And now,” said Polly, “ I want to see the house with the ‘ chamber under the eaves ’ where Hawthorne lived and wrote so long. Think of it—year after year, shut up there, scarcely ever going out except at night, and writing, writing, all the time—and having so little of what he wrote published! ”

“ There’s an example for you, Polly,” remarked Jack teasingly. “ We’ll have to get you a little room where you can burn up the thousands of masterpieces you write and can’t get published.”

Polly laughed good-naturedly. "Never mind, Jack-be-nimble, Jack-be-quick," she said. "Hawthorne won fame in his little room."

"Here you are, Polly," said Perry, stopping before a tall, high-shouldered wooden structure, plainly a tenement-house, standing in a mean and slummy street. "Here you are—this is No. 12 Herbert Street."

No amount of enthusiasm for literary shrines could blind Polly to its dreary aspect. "Oh," she cried, disappointed, "is that it? Oh, dear!"

Margery tried to comfort her. "Well, anyway," she said, "the beach and the ocean aren't far off. And he could look out of the window at that church steeple—perhaps it seemed very artistic with the sunset behind it. And besides, this neighborhood has gone down—it probably didn't look a bit like this when Hawthorne lived here."

"Yes," said Polly, "that is so. But that house could never have been anything but hideous. Well, it just shows that outside things don't make as much difference as we think. But imagine Hawthorne's being patient

enough to go on writing and writing without much hope in that dreary place.”

“Now, let’s go and see the Custom House,” suggested Mrs. Endicott. “There’s another place where Hawthorne was patient. For the work there was uncongenial and he longed to have time to write.”

They went to the lofty neighbor of the humble dwelling, the big, square Custom House with its wide granite steps and columned portico.

“Do you remember,” asked Mrs. Endicott, “when he was dismissed from his position here, how he went home to break the news to his wife? And how she exclaimed, ‘Oh, then you can write your book!’? And how, when he smiled and answered that he did not know where their ‘bread and rice were to come from while the story was writing,’ she brought out from some hiding place a pile of gold that she had saved from the weekly household expenses. I always like to think about that story.”

“There’s another example for you, Polly,” remarked Jack. “Always keep a pile of gold on hand for your husband.”

“I don’t intend to bother with a husband,”

retorted Polly, calmly, with a backward look at the Custom House.

"And now for luncheon," said Mrs. Endicott, as they left Salem, "as soon as we find a suitable place we will get out and unpack our tea-baskets."

They had some trouble in finding the spot their imagination had painted as the ideal one for the picnic luncheon.

"Sweetly along the Salem road,
Bloom of orchard and lilac showed,' "

Mrs. Endicott quoted ruefully. "I wish that they would show for us. A flowering orchard would be just the thing."

"But the orchards aren't blooming now," objected Jack.

"Don't be so literal, Jack," laughed his aunt. "That was just a flight of poetic fancy on my part. Oh, there, children, see that little strip of wood ahead—perhaps we'll find *the* perfect spot there!"

A little clearing in the woods gave a vista of the ocean, brilliantly blue and with a white-winged sailboat darting upon it. A tiny fern-bordered brook meandered toward the sea, and

a strip of sun-dappled grass beside it seemed to invite the picnickers to stop and spread there the contents of their tea-baskets.

“Oh, isn’t this glorious?” cried Margery as she sat with her back against a pine-tree, waving a sandwich in one hand and an olive in the other. “Don’t you love picnic meals?”

“Especially the beasts,” declared Jack as he disputed the possession of a sandwich with a yellow-jacket and was almost defeated. “I haven’t swallowed more than three ants and five caterpillars.”

“Why, Jack,” said Polly, “you ought to be ashamed to mention such a trifle. Nobody minds those things at a picnic! Oh, dear,” as she unpacked a box of highly colored fancy cherries, “these cherries got crushed.”

“Cherries are so perishable,” commented Esther.

“You mean,” laughed Polly, “that Perrys are so cherishable,—as Jane would say it.”

“Not when they are stepbrothers,” put in Perry, throwing an olive-stone at the squirrel peeping at them around the trunk of a tree.

“Cheer up, Perry,” urged Jack. “Smile an’ show him’s pretty toofies. Or rather,”

folding his hands on his knees and dropping his head with an absurd imitation of Jane, "peer up, Cherry."

"Jack, behave," ordered Mrs. Endicott, but Jack was enjoying himself too much to stop. "Ladies and gentlemen—or I should say, gadies and lentlemen—I will now give you an address in the style of my esteemed sister Jane Gale—or Gain Jail, I should say. Would you prefer a lecture on Keats and Shelly, or one on Sheets and Kelly, as Jane would say? Or, or—er—well,—or would you ladies prefer to have me tell your fortunes, and tell you about a certain gentleman with hooked eyes and a black nose who will cross your paths? And—and ——"

"Sit down and shut up," ordered Perry, and Jack, having reached the end of his inventive powers, meekly accepted his brother's invitation.

"I think it's a shame to make fun of Jane, Jack," said Polly warmly. "I think she's simply sweet."

"It's very ill-bred and unkind of you," said his aunt severely.

Jack flushed and said nothing, and Margery

came to his rescue. "I tease Jane to her face, Aunt Kate," she said gently. "She thinks the slips she makes are awfully funny now, and she often tells me, when I am posing for her, about the killing things she has said when she was embarrassed. But we all feel rather cross at her to-day because she wouldn't come with us."

Mrs. Endicott sighed. "Poor Jane," she said. "But now," she added, looking at the watch on her wrist, "I have to be home very soon—I'm sorry to break up this pleasant party, but the Hootens are coming this afternoon, and I must be there."

"Oh, mother," protested Katherine, "it's a shame to hurry away from this perfect spot. And we haven't finished yet, either—I'm still hungry. Can't you go on without us?"

"But how would you get home? You can't all go in one car."

"Walter can drive you home in our car, Aunt Kate," put in Margery, "and the rest of us can pile in the other when we are ready to go."

"I'll look after them, mother," added Katherine, "and bring them all, especially Jack, up in the way they should go."

“We’ll be pretty crowded all in one car,” said Perry. “But we’re near the station here, and part of us can go home to Winchester by train.”

An hour later Margery, Perry, and Dick, who had voted for the train, climbed aboard at the pretty little rustic station set in the woods. The train was crowded, as the afternoon trains from the city were apt to be, and they had to scatter through the car. Margery sat down beside a stout, middle-aged woman who obligingly gave her a magazine to look at. But an illustration in it reminded her of Jane’s shy prettiness, and her thoughts drifted off to her new friend. Jane, she decided, seemed livelier and more like other girls than she had at first, and she looked stronger and healthier, too. They had had some long talks together in Jane’s pretty little living-room, while Margery was posing for the portrait, and she had come to know something of the meagerness and the restrictions of the life that Jane had led, and a little of her dreams for the future. Margery knew that the other girl admired her and depended upon her, but she felt disappointed that she had not been able to change her attitude to-

ward her stepfather and stepbrothers. "I can't—I just can't pretend I like them," Jane would say with quivering lips and Margery would have to drop the subject.

The train stopped at another little rustic station, and Margery, so wrapped up in Jane were her thoughts, was scarcely surprised to see Jane herself enter the car. It seemed almost as though she had conjured her up. As a place was made for Jane toward the front of the car, directly across the aisle from Perry, Margery noted with amusement; she remembered that all the members of the art class had been invited to visit that afternoon the studio of a well-known artist whose summer home was on the North Shore. Jane was evidently coming home alone earlier than the others.

Margery picked up the magazine again and tried to interest herself in a story. Suddenly a stifled exclamation caught her attention and she raised her eyes. Jane, her cheeks scarlet and her eyes big and frightened, was frantically searching for something while the big, grim conductor stood sternly over her.

"I—I—I've lost it," stammered Jane. "What shall I do?"

"Guess you'll have to get off at the next station," said the conductor, a notoriously unpleasant and unpopular person.

Margery, guessing that Jane had lost her purse, was about to go forward to her assistance, when Perry leaned over and put his hand on the man's arm. "I'll settle this," he said as the conductor turned. "I happen to know the young lady." He slipped some money into the other's hand, and the interested and amused passengers, seeing that the little comedy was over, turned back to their papers and to looking out of the window.

"Of course, she'll have to thank him now," thought Margery, "and they'll have a talk together."

But Jane, her cheeks still scarlet, only managed to give Perry the shyest little peck of a bow, and turned her gaze resolutely out of the window.

"Hello, Jane," said Margery as she stepped down to the platform at the Winchester station.

"Oh," cried Jane, startled, "were you on that train?"

"Yes, I was there. I was just coming to

your rescue when Perry got in ahead of me."

"Oh, wasn't it awful? I've lost my purse—and it had two dollars in it. I was so scared; I don't know what I'd have done if Perry hadn't helped me out!"

"Why didn't you thank him then?" asked Margery severely. "You were awfully snippy."

"I didn't mean to be," answered Jane miserably, "I—I just couldn't help it. I really was humbly grateful."

"Well, here he is—thank him now."

"Oh, I can't," whispered Jane in a sudden panic of shyness. "What shall I say to him?"

"Say just what you said to me—that you're humbly grateful."

Jane turned to Perry, who, with Dick, was leaning against a baggage truck waiting for the girls to be through with their conversation. "I'm—I'm," she said meekly, "I'm grumbly hateful."

CHAPTER XIII

PLANS

“GRANDPAPA,” said Margery, “we used ten pounds of butter last week.”

“That is nice,” answered Mr. Morris sleepily. He had just wakened from a little nap.

“But, grandpapa,” Margery’s tone was tragic, “that’s too much. Kiley is entirely too extravagant. There is no sense in using as much butter in cooking as she does. I wish that you would speak to her about it.”

Mr. Morris grew more wakeful. “Speaking to” Kiley was something that he did not enjoy. “I, well,—well, of course, she has to have the things to cook with,” he began.

Margery laughed. “I believe that you are afraid of Kiley, grandpapa. I suppose that I shall have to do the lecturing myself. Of course at home in Renwyck’s Town where we have our own cows, it’s different, but up here,

where we have to buy every bit of butter, she will have to be more careful."

Quite determined, Margery turned back to the household bills which she had spread out on the big porch table and weighted down with shells to keep them from blowing away in the sea-breeze.

"Dear me," she commented, "there's a lot to do in running a house—I never realized before how hard mamma must have to work to keep the house up to the standard that she does, and to entertain and do all things that she does beside."

With a capability beyond her years, Margery had gradually assumed much of the burden of the housekeeping. Most of the actual ordering of supplies was done by Sarah and old Kiley, the cross cook, but Margery went over the bills each week before they were given to her grandfather to pay, and she kept a general oversight over the kitchen.

As she slipped one bill under a shell and took up another long list, she said to herself a little wearily that she was feeling tired. It was something of a task for a young house-keeper to have two guests, to see that they were

happy and amused, and to provide entertainment for the other young people who made the big white cottage a sort of headquarters. Dick and Sam, Perry and Jack were always at hand, Katherine Endicott and Mary Benton, although they were older than Margery, were fond of dropping in, and there was a large group of other boys and girls who took it as a matter of course that all of their evenings and half of their days should be spent at the Morris's. Mr. Morris had old-fashioned ideas of a lavish hospitality; guests must always be welcomed and refreshments served.

"Polly," sighed Margery, checking up the items on the bill in her hand, "don't let me forget to tell Sarah to order some lemons—Jack and Perry, and Mary Benton and all that older crowd want to come here to dance this evening—the club-house is being used for a men's smoker. Besides, our floor *is* good, you know. As Jack and Perry are coming, I suppose that we had better ask Sam and Dick."

Polly looked up from her book. "Yes, indeed," she said cheerfully, "I'll nudge you up about the lemons. You really ought to read this, Margie. It is ever so interesting."

“What is so interesting?” asked Mr. Morris.

“This life of Louisa Alcott—it’s all about her life in Concord, and the fun she had with her sisters, and the awful struggles her family had when they were so poor. I’d love to see their old house. Some day when I can persuade father and mother to come up here in the car I want to go around to see all the places where the famous writers lived and the places they wrote about. Just as we went to see Hawthorne’s home, and the House of the Seven Gables yesterday.”

Mr. Morris took off his glasses. “Well, you know, I have been thinking out some plans. Yesterday’s little trip seemed such a success, I wonder if it wouldn’t be a good thing to extend it a little. We might take our car and Mrs. Endicott’s, and then if Mrs. Endicott is willing to go along to chaperone you, you might run down to Boston and Concord, and then across the state to the Berkshires. There are literary shrines there, too—and it is a beautiful trip. I won’t be able to go with you—but I have an idea that I might be able to persuade Mrs. Endicott to go.”

Esther put down her sewing. "Wouldn't it be wonderful!" she cried, her dark eyes shining. "Think of seeing all those places!"

Margery said nothing, but she sighed with a certain sense of relief. It would seem very restful to her just to settle back in a corner of the car and go spinning over country roads, and not to have to think about humoring Kiley because Katherine or one of the boys had dropped in and had stayed for luncheon.

"Well, I think you girls can make your plans," smiled Mr. Morris, putting on his glasses and picking up a book from the little table by his side. "In fact the subject was mentioned last night, and Mrs. Morris seemed to be quite in favor of it."

Polly and Esther went off to write home letters, and Margery, when her accounts were done at last, perched on the arm of her grandfather's chair, a sheaf of papers in her hand.

"It was like you, grandpapa dear," she said affectionately, "to have a plan like this up your sleeve. I hope that you will have a good rest while we are away. I'm afraid that we're too noisy—it's hard not to be noisy with a whole

crowd of boys and girls running in and out all the time."

"I hope that all these boys and girls aren't tiring you out, dear. Sometimes I wish that we had chosen a quieter place for the summer."

Margery stoutly denied the possibility of being tired. "No, indeed," she insisted. "Here are the bills—you can look them over as soon as you have time. Let me see who will go on our trip—Aunt Kate, and Polly, Esther and I, and possibly Katherine. And the four boys of course. I wonder if Jane would go."

"You might ask her," Mr. Morris suggested. "It certainly wouldn't do any harm to ask her. Explain to her where you are going, and what your ideas are for the trip."

"I do wish that Jane would be sensible," remarked Margery, pensively picking a dead leaf from the geranium in the big stone vase on the veranda balustrade.

"Well, don't try to influence her too much, dear. Don't interfere. I think that would-be peace-makers are often responsible for a lot of mischief. And really, it is rather an impertinence on their parts to interfere the way that they do. And too often their idea is simply to

urge the weaker vessel to give in—and then they pat themselves on the back and think what fine people they are. There is such a thing as justice and the real peace-maker acts first in accord with that.”

Margery stood up. “Don’t be afraid, grandpapa,” she laughed. “I won’t go lecturing Jane, and poking into things. But now I must go down and pose for that portrait. And while I am there I will put the matter of the trip before her—very gently,” she added with another laugh.

Polly and Esther were deep in home letters. Margery paused to speak a few minutes, then after she had dressed in her green frock and found her big hat where Sarah had put it too carefully away, she went down to Buttercup Cottage.

“Oh, Margery!” Jane came running to the door enveloped in a long gingham apron. “I was going to send you word—oh, dear, I am ever so sorry, but I forgot! I won’t be able to paint you this morning. Cousin Willy is going to have some people in to tea this evening, and I have to make a cake.”

Margery hesitated. She realized that she

felt tired and had been looking forward to the quiet hour spent posing in Jane's little parlor. If she went home now, she would be certain to be pressed into a tennis game or a trip to the village, and with that pride which makes young people hate to admit that they are less strong and energetic than their mates, she dreaded having to decline and make explanations.

"Can't I do something to help you?"

Jane caught a certain wistfulness in her tone. "Yes, indeed—you might seed raisins. I'd love to have you come in and talk to me, anyway."

The little kitchen was especially charming that morning with a bed of fragrant stocks blooming under the window and filling the room with their sweetness, and with the sunshine streaming in to turn the shining pots and pans to silver. A sea-breeze came gently through the open back door and ruffled the spotless blue and white muslin Jane had hung over window and cupboard shelves. Margery, enveloped in a big apron, perched on a stool and seeded raisins while Jane beat eggs. Cousin Willy, who was making ice-cream, bustled about, full of stories about Margery's

mother when she was Elizabeth Marshall, the terror and pet of the boarding-school which Cousin Willy and Mrs. Endicott, and Jane's mother as well, had all attended. Margery found it all very homelike and restful, and the fact that her mother and Jane's had been schoolgirl friends, drew Jane closer in her affections.

"It's ever so nice having school-friends, isn't it?" she commented, eating a raisin as reward for her labors. "You enjoy them when you're young and then you enjoy them when you're older and can look back on things. There are lots of little incidents that Polly and I will laugh over some day together, I know. By the way, Jane, won't you come on a motor trip with us if we can get it up?"

Jane's face brightened. "A motor trip, oh, how perfect! Where to?"

"It's grandpapa's idea—we enjoyed going down to Salem so much the other day and Polly has talked so much about Hawthorne ever since that he thought it would be a good plan for us to go to see the homes of a lot of the famous old writers. To go to Concord and see Louisa Alcott's home, and so forth

and so on. And then from there we will go on to the Berkshires. It would be such fun to have you—do come! We'd be gone for about a week, I imagine. We won't have any set time though, for we won't have to hurry. Do come—they say the Berkshires are perfectly beautiful, and you ought to enjoy them."

"Yes, it would be delightful," smiled Cousin Willy, foreseeing pleasure for Jane in the plan.

"It would be fun," agreed Jane, pouring a stiff froth of eggs into a bowl. "Who would go, Margery—you and Polly and Esther and I, and your grandfather?"

"Oh, no, grandpapa couldn't go. He can't stand long rides like that. Aunt Kate would have to chaperone us. And we wouldn't want to leave Dick and Sam out, of course. And Perry would have to go along to run Aunt Kate's car. We are going to take the two cars—just as we did yesterday—so as to have plenty of room. It gets so tiresome when people are all crowded into one car, and have to sit on the little side-seats all day, especially over mountain roads."

"Oh," said Jane a little flatly. "Oh."

She went to the refrigerator and got out a small pitcher of cream. "I don't see how," she began, coming back into the kitchen.

"Oh, do come, Jane," urged Margery. "It would be the life and soul of the party to have you. We'd all enjoy it so much more if you were to come."

"I don't see how I can possibly come," Jane went on firmly, although her lips trembled a little. "It would make me miss a whole week of the art class, and then when I got back I wouldn't feel a bit like settling down and going to work."

"Now, Jane," remonstrated Cousin Willy.

"I'd simply love to go, Margery, and you're a dear to think of asking me—but I simply couldn't. Cousin Willy," Jane added quickly as Margery started to make a renewed plea—"there isn't enough cream here—I'll have to go down cellar for some more."

She ran out of the room.

"Jane does want to go," Margery declared in a low voice to Cousin Willy. "She shows that she wants to go. She's backing out just because the Watkins boys are going. Just the way she did yesterday. The boys are such

nice boys—I should think that Jane would see that.”

However Cousin Willy might criticize Jane herself, she was always loyally ready to take up the cudgels if anyone else attacked her.

“The boys being nice have nothing to do with the case,” she declared. “In time it will, but not now. You can’t expect a girl of Jane’s reserve and sensitiveness to accept two strange boys on the intimate plane of brothers right away. Why, it is less than six weeks since her mother married. Another type of girl might be influenced by the boys’ good looks and their social popularity, and by the fact that they have plenty of money and are in a position to pay her many pleasant little attentions. But Jane is not the self-seeking type of girl. Her mother’s marriage was a shock and disappointment to her, and it will take her a little while to get used to the idea of it. When she does accept those boys as her brothers and Mr. Watkins as father, she will be unfailingly loyal. All the more loyal because she has been slow.”

“Yes,” Margery agreed thoughtfully. “I suppose that is so.”

“Personally, I prefer the sensitive, reserved people,—they are apt to be more faithful. But don’t worry about Jane and the Watkins boys. Time and circumstances are certain to do their work. It may be soon or it may be later. Patience isn’t a virtue that you young people like to hear much about—but I have come to have great faith in patience. It always rewards me.”

Margery laughed and got down from her stool. “Yes,” she said. “Patience does seem so stodgy.”

On her way home Margery met little Andrew Watkins clambering up over the rocks, a bucket in his hand.

“Andy-boy, what have you got there?” she hailed him.

“Star-fish,” breathed Andy, through the gaps left by his missing front teeth.

Margery loved children, and had an especial knack with small boys. “Oh, they are fine,” she said enthusiastically, bending over the bucket. “I’ll have to show you how to dry them some day. Have you any sea-urchins yet?”

“Margery—can’t I go home with you for

luncheon? Aunt Kate is going to a party in Winchester—and I don't like it when she is away. Please, Margie—I want to come with you."

Margery hesitated. She hated to refuse the child, but if Kiley were not in a good humor, she might have some trouble to make peace in the kitchen.

"All right, chick," she said at last, "come along."

As they neared the house a melancholy me-owing in a tree whose branches spread above their heads made them look up.

"Oh, Andy," Margery exclaimed, "it's Kiley's cat! It's Patti! If you can get it down Kiley will certainly be willing for you to stay for luncheon. She adores that kitten!"

"All right. I'll get it—just watch me!"

He caught hold of a lower branch and tried to swing himself up into the tree. "Margery!" he panted after several ineffectual efforts, "I—I can't do it—you will have to boost me."

Margery boosted with energy, and Andrew, red-faced and breathless, landed in the tree. "That cat's pretty high up," he announced,

sitting astride a big branch and looking up into the tree. "I'll have to climb up after it."

Margery watched him anxiously as he started to clamber up the big trunk. "Do be careful, Andy—don't try to do it if you think it isn't safe. Oh, do be careful!"

There was a sound of ripping cloth and Andrew slipped and slid downward a few inches. The kitten me-owed with renewed vigor.

"Oh, Andy—do be careful! Oh, Andy, come down."

"You stand ready, and catch me if I fall. I'll get that cat—just watch me."

"Andrew—come down." Margery's voice was stern.

No answer from above, and Margery stood anxiously waiting. What a goose she had been, she thought, to let Andrew try to get that cat!

"Andrew!" Her tone was commanding now. "Come down this instant!"

"I can't reach it, Margery," Andrew's voice floated down. "I'll have to climb higher."

"Oh, Andy, don't!" Margery beseeched him.

"What's the matter, Margery—what are

you so excited about?" asked some one back of her.

She turned. "Oh, Perry—I'm so glad to see you! I sent Andy up that tree to get Kiley's kitten, and now I'm scared to death! I'm so afraid he'll fall! Can't you make him come down? He doesn't obey me."

"Andrew, come down." Perry was peremptory. "I'll get it."

Rather unwillingly Andrew scrambled down. He had learned not to disobey his big brother. With a heroic disregard of white flannel trousers and white sweater, Perry drew himself up into the tree.

"The poor little beast was caught in a crotch of the branches and couldn't move," said Perry as he dropped a little bundle of quivering fur into Margery's waiting hands. "I suppose a dog chased it and it took refuge up the tree. What did you say its name is?"

"It was originally named Cutie, but Polly called it Patti because of its 'vocal accomplishments,' she says. Hereafter I'm going to call it 'Jane.'"

"Why—because it scratches," and Perry ruefully rubbed a red line on his hand.

“No, because it got up a tree and couldn’t get down.”

“Hmm.”

“You helped this Jane down out of the tree—perhaps you’ll have to help the other.”

With a laugh and a wave of her hand, Margery disappeared through a gap in the hedge.

CHAPTER XIV

A LITERARY PILGRIMAGE

“THESE cobblestones,” remarked Mrs. Endicott as the car bounced over a piece of rough paving, “remind me of the old English writer who visited here in Boston in 1699, and wrote that ‘the buildings, like the women, are erect and handsome, and the streets, like the hearts of the male inhabitants, are paved with pebbles.’ ”

Mrs. Endicott, Margery and Polly, Esther and Katherine, as well as the four boys, had started that morning for the talked-of motor trip. The first stop was in Boston. They had decided, although there was much that they wanted to see there, not to linger more than was necessary to make some purchases for the trip, but to go straight to Concord and then on to the Berkshires. Cambridge they would visit on the way home, or save for a short trip some other time.

"We can't do everything at once," Polly sighed regretfully as they left Boston. "But I do hate having to miss anything."

"Where shall we go first here?" asked Mrs. Endicott as they drew near to Concord. "Shall we be historical or literary?" she went on as no one answered.

"Historical," said Perry, who was running the car.

"Literary," cried Polly.

"Don't let's be either," suggested Jack. "Let's get something to eat."

"Let's go first to the bridge," said Margery, paying no attention to Jack. "That seems the place we ought to want to see most."

She stood up and waved to the other car following just far enough behind to escape the dust, calling, "Bridge! Bridge!"

Sam waved in answer and she sat down again.

"Someone said that this is the spot where America altered her destiny," observed Mrs. Endicott as the car stopped at the bridge and they all got out by the weathered granite monument bearing the proud inscription com-

memorating the first forcible resistance in the Revolutionary war. It was all very still and peaceful, the river flowed along placidly, the flickering shadows of the trees softened the grim outlines of the granite shaft and made mysterious the bronze figure of French's noble Minuteman at the opposite end of the bridge. Quietly Margery slipped away from the others and crossing the bridge stood before the statue. Something in the handsome, boyish face fascinated her. Gazing at it thoughtfully, she tried to imagine that long-ago day when the Minuteman had stood there in battle, facing the British regulars drawn up on the opposite side of the bridge, and to realize something of what that day had meant in the history of the two nations.

"Why so pensive, Margie?" asked Dick, who had slipped away from the others to join her. "What are you dreaming about?"

"Oh, Dick, isn't he wonderful?"

Dick looked up at the statue. "Yes," he said in the abrupt manner he had whenever he was moved. "He isn't so bad."

"Oh, Dick," Margery objected. "What a way to put it. Oh, here come the others!"

But Dick did not hear her. Half to himself, half aloud he was repeating:

“ ‘And there the embattled farmers stood,
And fired the shot heard round the world.’ ”

“What’s that?” asked Jack, coming up.
“What are you muttering about, Dick?”

Dick was disgusted. “There’s no reverence about these people, Margery,” he said. “Come on, let’s go and look at the graves of the British soldiers.”

“Now then, we’ve been historical,” said Mrs. Endicott as at last they drew themselves reluctantly away from the river and the bridge, “so it’s time to be literary. We’ll go and visit some of our literary shrines. Suppose we visit Emerson’s home first.”

Across a gently sloping field to the right, as she spoke, there opened up the view of a white house behind a line of lofty pine and chestnut trees. It stood close to the road behind another line of trees.

“Oh, isn’t that the place?” cried Esther, her attention seized by its dignity and air of refinement.

“That’s the Emerson house,” said Mrs.

Endicott. "We'll stop in front of it—I don't know whether we can go in or not."

In front of the house Mrs. Endicott told them something of the gentle sage who had lived there. Except Polly and Perry none of the young people had read any of Emerson's writings beyond a poem or two, but as Mrs. Endicott told the story of his fatherless boyhood and his youthful fight with the grim wolf of dire poverty, his struggles as a boy of nineteen to teach in a fashionable young ladies' boarding-school where his pupils, some of them older than himself, cruelly used to ask him for a holiday on election day, "while he voted," well aware that he was a minor, they were fired with a desire to know him through his works. Most interesting of all to the girls was to learn of his kindness to the Alcott family and of his way of leaving money for them under a book on the table or behind a candlestick on the mantle.

"And he really was the original of Mr. Lawrence in 'Little Women,' Aunt Kate? Are you sure?" asked Margery as they went on their way again.

"Quite," said Mrs. Endicott with a laugh.

The road wound gently over a little rise and with a sweep to the left; there in a bay of the highway, stood a brown house behind two huge elms, a large, homelike old-fashioned house.

"Oh," cried Polly, as they came near, "there it is—there's the Orchard House—I know it from the pictures."

"We'll have to get out and go in here," said Mrs. Endicott. "The house is open to visitors."

"It looks just like the place you would want the 'Little Women' and Louisa Alcott to live in," remarked Margery as they walked up the path. "It's so homey."

They lingered outside under the big elms before they went into the house. Jack and Perry had never read Miss Alcott's books, and only Polly and Mrs. Endicott knew much about the woman herself, brave, witty and tender, her life as interesting as anything she wrote.

Between Polly and Mrs. Endicott a fair sketch of her was pieced together; the story of her youthful poverty, the long hard struggle which never quenched her sense of fun or made

her bitter, and then the final coming of success and fame.

“The part I always loved best about her life was when she grew so famous that a woman came and collected the grasshoppers out of her front yard as souvenirs,” remarked Polly, one foot on the doorstep.

“And I always liked the time when she wrote that she was in a ‘vortex of debts, dishpans and depression,’ ” answered Mrs. Endicott. “Shall we go in now?”

“Do you know, Polly,” said Margery as they followed into the house, “it does me good to think about people like Miss Alcott, who have been so brave and plucky, and have fought against such tremendous odds,—and have succeeded in the end.”

Bravery in any form always appealed to Margery. As she wandered through the old house she grew silent and thoughtful; her own life had been so easy, so happy, she suddenly realized, so different from what many other girls had to endure, and she wondered if real trouble came to her if she would have the courage to face it.

“What’s the matter?” asked Dick. “You’ve

stared at the flowers painted on that door-panel for five minutes, and I don't believe you have seen one of them."

Margery roused herself with a laugh, and joined the others in trying to picture the four young heroines of "Little Women" in the place of its setting.

"It's very inspirational," observed Mrs. Endicott with a sigh, as they left the house at last, and strolled under the elms back to the cars. "It really is inspirational to see the home of a woman who had such patience, such an unwavering purpose in developing her talents, and who worked so hard under difficulties, and who had at the same time so much family feeling, and neighborliness, and ungrudging generosity."

"It will seem flat," said Polly, as she climbed into the car with a wistful backward look at the homelike old house under the elms, "to have just Hawthorne's house to look at—after this."

"Why, Polly," laughed Perry, "you're going back on your beloved Hawthorne!"

"Cheer up, Polly," comforted Dick, who was deep in a guide-book. "Louisa Alcott

lived in Hawthorne's house before he did. That was before they moved to the Orchard House. So brace up and try to bear it."

"You are talking about Wayside," answered Polly, who also had a guide-book. "But he lived at the Manse, too."

They visited the Manse and Wayside, then down to Sleepy Hollow, the famous, beautiful cemetery where are the graves of the three neighbors, Emerson, Hawthorne and Louisa Alcott.

"Now we mustn't forget Walden, and to see the cairn by the lake to mark the spot where Thoreau had his little hut, and studied nature," suggested Mrs. Endicott.

"I don't like the sound of Thoreau," objected Margery. "He sounds so old and whiskery. Of course we have to study about him in school—but that's all that I want to have to know about him."

"Evidently you don't admire whiskers, Margery," smiled Perry. "But Thoreau wasn't old—he was quite young when he died. And he must have been a lively, amusing person to know. After he left college he tried to teach school—he wouldn't whip his scholars

often enough, so the school-board objected. Then he whipped half a dozen of the youngsters on the same day, to please the school-board, and that evening sent in his resignation."

"And," added Mrs. Endicott, "when his first book was printed, only two hundred and thirteen volumes sold out of the thousand that were printed. So Thoreau—he was little more than a boy then—brought all the unsold copies home in a wheelbarrow, and wrote in his diary, 'I have a library of nearly nine hundred volumes, over seven hundred of which I wrote myself.' I should like to have known a boy who could take a disappointment as gayly as that."

Concord said good-bye to at last, Margery thoroughly enjoyed the trip across the state to the Berkshire Mountains. The weather was perfect, the cars ran well, and they had few punctures, and the little company was gay and good-natured. They found fun in everything; and Esther and Jack added to their amusement by collecting the queer old epitaphs to be found on the tombstones in the old mountain cemeteries.

“Here’s a lovely one,” cried Esther, coming back from an expedition into a lonely graveyard. “Just listen to this, Margery—it ought to interest you, as it’s evidently written about some one named Margaret. Listen:

“ ‘Here lies Mag.
No brag.
Both fair
And wise.’ ”

“I like the one you got this morning,” added Polly. “The one about Deacon Wadsworth.”

“Oh, you mean this one,” said Esther, consulting her note-book. “Here it is:

“ ‘Reader, expect the day that shall reveal to an assembled world the piety and virtues of Deacon James Wadsworth.’ ”

“The one, ‘Her thinkings and achings are o’er,’ particularly appeals to me,” observed Jack. “And I should think that it would appeal to you ladies who ride in the car that Perry is driving. You certainly do some hard thinking when he whirls round corners, and your bones ache from the bumps you get. He has a genius for finding hills and hollows in the road.”

“That’s a base libel,” cried Polly and Margery together. “Perry is a splendid driver!”

Perry was grateful. “Thank you, ladies,” he said, and missed running over a dog by a hair’s breadth, to the unaffected delight of his brother.

Margery enjoyed the trip across the country so much that she was sorry when they finally reached Lenox, and settled down at the hotel there for a couple of days’ stay. But big fashionable hotels were more of a novelty to Esther and Polly, and they were never tired of watching the people in the dining-room and the corridors, and of admiring the pretty women and handsome dresses. It was a delight to them, too, to wander about the near-by countryside, through shady, moss-carpeted woods, or upon the roads high among the hills overlooking miles of peaceful valley and mountain. The great estates interested them, and they were never weary of commenting upon the varieties of architecture shown—the Swiss chalets and Tudor castles, the Colonial mansions and the turreted, minareted composite, distinguished in nothing but size.

One morning, clear and crisp, with only a

faint blue haze over the more distant mountains, they walked out to the site of the "Little Red House" where Hawthorne had written the "House of the Seven Gables." The house itself had been burned down, but they managed, with the help of a little guide-book, to reconstruct it in their imaginations.

"And anyway," said Polly, "we can see the same view that he saw."

"I don't wonder that Hawthorne wrote to Longfellow from here that he was as happy as mortal could be," remarked Mrs. Endicott, gazing off over the distant lake and Monument Mountain. "It is all so beautiful and peaceful that it makes one feel rather wistful. But," she added with a smile, "perhaps if I could stay here and rest, I would get to feeling that it was too peaceful and restful, as Hawthorne himself finally did, and to say with that that I longed for 'sea-breezes and dock-mud, and to tread pavements.'"

Polly had brought the "Wonder Book" and "Tanglewood Tales" and she and Margery, with Dick, wandered off to one side, and sitting down on a log, read over the introductions and tried to remember that Eustace Bright of the

books was Hawthorne himself and that the children to whom the stories were told, Primrose, Sweet Fern, Clover and the rest, were the Hawthorne children and some of their young neighbors.

"The old boy seems to have been a regular guy with the kids," remarked Jack elegantly, taking a seat on the log beside Margery. "He flew kites with them, and went nutting with them, and skating—quite a sport, in fact."

"Jack," protested Polly, "you must be more respectful to the memory of the great man," and the reading ended in one of the spirited disputes in which Polly and Jack were fond of indulging.

Lenox was so beautiful that it was with real regret that the little party finally tore itself away.

"I love it at Wyanoke," sighed Margery as she took her place in the car for the return trip, "but I wish that I could stay here too!" She leaned back in the seat and carefully adjusted her long silk dust-robe about her. "Now then," she said, folding her hands in her lap, "bring on your 'sea-breezes and dock-mud.'"

CHAPTER XV

WYANOKE AGAIN

THE portrait of Margery was finished at last, and all the young people except Jack and Perry went to see it and declared it to be a remarkable work of genius. If Dick's praise was more reserved, nobody paid any attention to that, for Dick was apt not to say very much.

"It doesn't look very much like me, does it, Dick?" asked Margery as she and Dick were canoeing one evening. "Portraits are not always expected to look like the people they are supposed to be, are they?"

Dick was non-committal. "Well, I should say," he answered, dipping his paddle, "that this portrait looks rather more like a dollar-a-week-dish-washer than it does like the august lady who arrived from California last fall."

Margery laughed, relieved. Although she had singularly little vanity about her appear-

ance she preferred not to think that she looked as Jane had represented her. She wished incidentally that Dick would stop teasing her about her scheme of money-making and about her first days in Renwyck's Town.

"Wouldn't you like to learn to paddle?" queried Dick. "I'll teach you, if you'd like."

Margery acquiesced, and they put in to the club-house wharf that Margery might change her place to the bow, Dick always standing firmly to the rule that no one should change places in midstream in either the canoe or row-boat when he was there to prevent it. A paddle was put into Margery's hand and they started up the bay again. It was twilight and there were few other craft out. A soft light lay over land and water and there was scarcely a sound beyond the faint gluck-gluck of their paddles dipping and the cry of a sleepy bird in the trees along the shore. Dick was silent, as he was always content to be if Margery were there to do the talking for him. Margery, too, was quiet, dreamily enjoying the long reflections in the bay, and the misty purple outlines of its surrounding rocks and dunes and stretches of pine woods.

“What’s the matter, Margery?” inquired Dick. “You aren’t usually so speechless.”

“I—I was just enjoying it,” answered Margery dreamily. “I went over to Winchester with Jane to-day,” she went on, rousing herself, “to see the portrait hung in the studio. And do you know, Dick,” screwing around to address him, “it made me wonder.”

“Whoa—there! Steady in the bow! How ‘wonder’?”

“I was thinking about her winning the prize. Of course, I want her to get it—but she was talking a lot about it, and I do wish that she wanted it for something else than what she does. You see, if she gets the prize it means an art scholarship in New York next winter, and with what little money she has she can go there and study, and then she wants to win a scholarship to study abroad.”

“Well, what’s wrong with that? Pretty good idea, it seems to me. Don’t dip your paddle so deep. And don’t wiggle so—we’ll have an upset.”

“Why, don’t you see, Dick,” answered Margery, heroically trying not to turn round in the bow seat and face Dick as she talked. “She

wants to get away from her stepfather and Marion—and everybody. That's what makes me wonder if it's right. She says if she is making her own way they can't keep her home with them. And, somehow, I can't help wishing that she were doing this just because she really loved the work—and not merely to get away from the Watkins. Papa and mamma knew several artists at home—real ones—and they seemed to think about their work and not just the triumphs it was going to bring them. They were very different from Jane in lots of ways."

"I should think so," agreed Dick, somewhat dryly. "Any art, I suppose, is like your friends—you have to love them for themselves alone, and not what you are going to get out of them. Sit still, Margery! I'm perfectly willing, of course, to save your fair young life, but I'd hate to get the polish on these shoes dimmed."

Margery laughed and turned her attention to keeping still and managing her paddle.

"Did you know that Jack is to have a part in the play they are getting up at the club?"

remarked Dick. "Katherine engineered it. They've given him the part of a not overly-bright farm boy."

"Yes—Katherine asked me to be in it. But grandpapa wouldn't let me—he said I was getting too tired. So Mary Benton is to take that part."

"Mary Benton wants to be careful, by the way, how she swims out so far," Dick commented. "She got used up to-day, and two of the fellows had to bring her in."

"Oh, but Dick—she's so wonderfully athletic."

"She thinks she is," returned Dick without enthusiasm.

"I was awfully disappointed about not being in the play at first."

Dick looked at her keenly. "I guess your grandfather is right," he said. "You do look a little tired. You girls have been going it pretty hard."

"I must be," sighed Margery. "For I'm afraid that I've taken to imagining things lately."

They drew in by the club-house dock and Margery climbed out. As she turned toward

land she spied Jane sitting forlorn and lonely on a pile of life-preservers.

"Dear me, Jane," she protested, "you'll take cold sitting there—where's your sweater? Come on—Dick has to put the canoe up. There come Polly and Esther; they've been out in the other canoe with Sam. I wonder where they went—we didn't see them when we went up the bay. Come on—we'll all go up to the house and make fudge on the chafing-dish."

Jane got up obediently, and linked her arm with Margery's. "Oh, Margie," she whispered, "to-morrow we'll know who has won the scholarship—I'm scared to death!"

"Nonsense," consoled Margery. "Besides, even if you don't get it—you can try again for another. One swallow doesn't make a summer."

Jane squeezed her arm. "Margery," she confided, "although I'm all scared and shaky—I do feel in my bones that I'm going to get it."

"Your bones know," said Margery gayly. "So don't get scared. There comes Dick. It's getting chilly—and it will seem nice in the house this evening."

It did seem very "nice" in the big charming living-room of the cottage. Sarah had made a small fire on the grate and got ready the materials for the fudge-making. Esther and Polly, together with Sam, came trooping in on the others' heels and a few minutes later Jack and Perry arrived.

"We saw the lights, and thought something was doing," said Perry. "But, perhaps," with a deprecatory glance at his stepsister, "we're butting in, and we'd better vanish."

But Margery was firm. "Oh, don't go—you really mustn't. Jane can't drive away my friends! Besides, Jack is such an idiot that he'll keep even Jane from being stiff and embarrassed."

She waved her hand toward Jack, dancing in imitation of Pavlova and her Russian dancers, a yellow lamp-shade on his head and Margery's pink scarf draped about his waist as a ballet-skirt.

"This is it," he cried, prancing airily around the room. "They always look as though they had gone out barefoot and stepped on an eel, and didn't like the feel of the thing."

"Jack!" cried Polly. "When they dance

so beautifully, too! Come on, Perry—start up Twickenham Ferry.”

But Dick had joined Jack and was dancing the same skittish steps with an absolutely unmoved gravity of countenance.

“Oh, aren’t they funny?” cried Jane as Margery sat down on the davenport beside her. “Do take a lick at Duck!”

“Do, Margery,” urged Sam. “I suppose you mean, Jane, take a look at Dick—but Duck suits him better. Hello, Quack-quack. Come and sing, Duckie dear!”

“‘It’s puzzling work—talking is,’ as the man in ‘The Mill on the Floss’ said,” remarked Polly, sitting down on the other side of Jane. “At any rate with you around, Jane, it is. Come on, boys, we’re going to sing.”

“I’ll sing to you,” volunteered Jack, and keeping his balance on one foot as best he could, he stretched out his arms toward Jane, and warbled in a high falsetto:

“My love for you is like the ocean!
My love for you is like the sea!
My love for you is but a notion ——”

Jane flushed and looked embarrassed, and

Perry scowled at his brother. With a final trill and frantic hop to keep his balance, Jack hastily finished his song:

“My love for you is but a notion
Beside my love for—*me!*”

“A very modern love-song,” commented Mr. Morris, who had just come in the room. “Now let’s hear you sing Twickenham Ferry.”

Sam sat down at the piano and they began Twickenham Ferry, their favorite song of the moment.

“Well, nothing went wrong to-night,” Margery congratulated herself an hour or so later, as, the house quiet and the other girls asleep, she leaned out of her window for a final look at the moonlit bay. “And considering that things are rather strained between Jane and the Watkins boys, that was doing pretty well. I do wish Jane would be sensible.”

Thoughtfully watching a yacht anchored in the bay below, she stopped and hummed a bar of Twickenham Ferry, the song that the young people had sung so much of late, and which all her life would recall to Margery youth and happiness and high hopes and moonlit summer seas.

“ ‘The moon is arising on Petersham Hill,
And with love like a rose in the stern of the wherry,
There’s danger in crossing to Twickenham Town,’ ”

she sang softly to herself.

The next afternoon as she followed the path across the rocks home from Buttercup Cottage, she was singing Twickenham Ferry at the top of her clear young voice. There was no one else about and she exulted in the sense of freedom and of wide open spaces, the sound of the incoming tide beating against the rocks, and the tang of the damp salt air.

“ ‘It’s late as it is, and I haven’t a penny,
And how shall I get me to Twickenham Town?’ ”

she warbled, her head thrown back to let the wind blow through her curls.

“ ‘She’d a rose in her bonnet, and oh, she looked
sweet,
As the little pink flower that grows in the wheat,
With her cheeks like a rose and her lips like a
cherry,
And sure and you’re welcome to Twickenham
Town,’ ”

answered a big, boyish voice and Perry appeared round a point of the rocks.

“Where are you going?” asked Margery.

“Down to the beach to get my canoe. I left it there when we were in bathing this morning—and I’m going to take it round to the boat-house now. Come along, and I’ll take you for a paddle.”

“Many thanks, but I have to go home. Polly is taking her turn at a nap in the hammock, and Esther is writing letters. I just ran down to ask Jane to go to the dance and theatricals at the club to-morrow night. But she isn’t home yet, and her cousin seems rather worried.”

Perry frowned. “I suppose if you have Jane with you I won’t dare to go near the crowd—and Dick and Sam can have all the fun. It’s mighty pleasant to be the object of such disgust.”

Margery heard the hurt beneath the boyish bravado and said quickly, “She didn’t bite you the other night, Perry. And we would have missed you and Jack very much if you hadn’t been there. Besides, I can’t have Jane driving away all my dancing partners. I’m depending on you and Jack.”

Perry's face cleared. "All right, save the alternate dances for me."

Margery laughed again, a little embarrassed. "Gracious—I'm not going to dance *every* dance with you!"

Perry laughed, too. "No, I suppose I'd have to throw Dick off the dock to get them all."

"Oh, dear," Margery sighed, her face clouding. "I do wish that Jane would be sensible and that everything would be nice and peaceful."

"Cheer up! My lovely young sister will sprain her ankle or stub her toe on the railroad track just as a great express train comes pounding along. Sir Perry to the rescue! With a mighty shout I'll rush in and save the lady from under the very cow-catcher. Results? Tears, fainting, and stepbrothers elevated to a high and lofty state."

Margery laughed and went on her way down the hill toward home.

CHAPTER XVI

“WHAT’S THE MATTER?”

PERRY clambered down over the rocks toward the spot where he had beached his canoe. Suddenly he stopped and looked about him; he thought that he heard sobbing. A foggy wind blew in from the sea, and beach and rocks were deserted. The children usually to be found digging in the sand, making sand-forts or rows of marvellous sand-cakes, were absent and he could see no one but a young naturalist collecting seaweed in the little pools left in the rocks by the retreating tide.

He paused to look at the boy’s collection. “Going to dry them?” he asked. “I used to have a lot of cards of different kinds of seaweed.”

At the foot of the rocks he stopped and turned back; he was sure that he heard sobbing, pitiful sobbing like a hurt child.

“There is somebody crying—over there by

that rock! Some child has fallen and hurt itself."

He ran back, jumping over the pools in the rocks, slipped on some seaweed, almost fell, recovered himself and went on.

"Great Scott! *Jane?* What's the matter? Is anything wrong? Has any—has any bad news come from father—and your mother in Europe?"

Jane raised tear-brimmed eyes. "N-nothing," she faltered.

Perry crouched down beside her. "Oh, yes, there is," he insisted.

Jane gulped and made a pathetic attempt to restrain her flood of tears with a wet wad of handkerchief.

"N-nothing's the matter," she repeated, with another dab at her eyes and a long gasping breath.

Perry pulled a handkerchief out of the pocket of his sweater and offered it to her. "I used it as a dust-rag to dust off the seat in the launch for Aunt Kate," he said apologetically.

Jane took it mechanically, dazed by her violent weeping.

“Now then,” said Perry, as Jane wiped her eyes, “what’s the matter?”

“It’s nothing—just something about me.” With a rush of sobs Jane’s head went down on her knees again.

Relieved that no calamity had happened to the travellers, Perry stood up. What could he do, he thought miserably, with this weeping girl? He couldn’t go away and leave her! On the other hand, it was getting foggier every minute, and he did not enjoy the idea of taking the canoe around the long point of rocks in a heavy mist. He wished that Margery had come with him—she would know what to do. Or, if he only had Jack with him—or anybody, he finished hopelessly.

“See here,” he began abruptly, “you’ll have pneumonia if you stay here. It’s getting damper and damper every minute. Come on—I’m going to take my canoe around to the boat-house. Come along, and we can talk just as well as here.”

He put a big strong hand under Jane’s elbow and raised her to her feet before she knew what had happened. Pulling off his

heavy sweater, he threw it round her shoulders. "Now come on," he commanded.

Bewildered, Jane obeyed. She was too tired and unhappy to care what happened and only knew that there was something cheering in Perry's presence and reassuring in his big, booming voice. She was chilled, too, and the warm sweater was comfortable.

As steadied by Perry's hand she climbed over the rocks she grew more composed and her pride awoke. Pulling back, she murmured that she was all right now and would go back to the house. But as she pulled one way, Perry pulled harder toward the canoe.

"No," he insisted. "Come with me and tell me what the trouble is."

"But really," protested Jane, "I want to go back to the house!"

Perry's only answer was to hold her arm more firmly and half pull, half push her forward.

Proudly, Jane choked back her tears, and with no further protest quietly allowed herself to be helped into the canoe. She was very white, but she had obtained some degree of



SHE WAS TOO TIRED AND UNHAPPY TO CARE WHAT HAPPENED

composure. Perry noted the change with relief.

“Now then,” he ordered, as he pushed off, “tell me what under the sun’s the matter?”

Jane looked at him, and drew several long, heaving breaths without answering.

“What did I get myself into this mess for?” thought Perry in consternation. “Great Scott, is she going to turn on the weeps again?”

He dipped his paddle and turned the canoe toward the open water.

But Jane had no intentions of bursting into tears again. She was far too proud and shy to display her emotion to another in this fashion.

“It’s really nothing at all important,” she said quietly, dabbling her hand in the water. “I had a piece of news that upset me—that’s all.”

Perry bent to his paddle again and the canoe flew through the water.

“I have been trying for a prize at the art school,” Jane went on, feeling that perhaps more explanations were needed, “and I heard to-day that I’ve lost it.”

"Is that all—good-night! It's only one prize, and you'll win dozens yet!"

Jane smiled wearily, and Perry had his attention taken by the canoe for the next few minutes. They were going through rough water. "There," he said at last, "now that we're in the bay it will be easier going. You're a good little sport not to be scared by that rough bit at the end of the rocks," and he looked at Jane with a sudden new admiration, in spite of the fact that her features had become almost obliterated by her heavy weeping. "Most of the girls get scared to death if the waves wobble a little—all except Polly and Margery. But, I say," going back to the subject of the prize with more interest than he had shown before, "just losing one prize isn't anything. Why, you'll win a dozen yet!"

Jane hesitated. "It isn't only that," she began.

"I don't see how you ever managed to paint at all," Perry interrupted her, "with all the crowd piling in every time Margery went to you to pose."

"It wasn't only that," Jane said honestly. "You see, going over in the trolley to-day, I

heard ——” she stopped, and again Perry, panic-stricken, wondered if she were going to “turn on the weeps.”

“You see,” Jane went on after a minute, impelled by the longing for sympathy to confide in him, besides, there was a certain humaneness about Perry that influenced her in spite of herself. “It isn’t only that I’ve lost the prize—although I’m sorry on Margery’s account, after she has posed for me so—she’s really been awfully sweet about it! But what makes me feel bad is that coming home in the trolley car Mr. Hodge and another artist were talking back of me and I couldn’t help hearing what they were saying. They were talking about me.”

She stopped and Perry drew in near the club-house wharf. “Want to get out?” he asked. “Or shall we go up the bay—the fog isn’t so bad there.”

Jane hesitated, and Perry took matters into his own hands. He had the feeling that it was now or never if he was to accomplish the desired friendship with his stepsister. “Not that I care a whoop,” he said proudly to himself, “but it will please father.”

"We'll go up the bay," he announced firmly to Jane. "Now go on and tell me the rest."

"They were talking about the people who had talent—and about the ones who hadn't."

"Well," commented Perry, "I don't see why that should upset you."

Jane drew a long breath. "Great Scott! What did I ask her that for?" bemoaned Perry to himself. "Now she's going to cry again!" He dipped his paddle so deep that he sent a shower of silvery drops over the canoe.

Jane laughed a little, and went on. "They said that the people who had real talent are always happy to a certain extent—no matter what life brings them—because they always have their work and talent to console them, but that to the people with just a little talent it's certainly a long, heartrending climb."

"Oh, I see—I suppose they mentioned your name once or twice—very kind of them, I'm sure."

Jane smiled at his dry tone. "They mentioned me quite a little—among the latter cases," she said, her sense of humor beginning to assert itself. "In fact they used me as text and sermon."

Perry laughed. Jane really wasn't so bad after all, he concluded, even if she was cranky. "But why do you pay any attention to what that old geezer says? He doesn't know everything. Why, since the beginning of time great geniuses have been unappreciated! That's part of the game."

Jane raised her eyes and faced the truth. "But you see, I know he's right. I've been feeling it myself lately."

"Hmmm," remarked Perry, judicially, not knowing what else to say.

He laid his paddle across his knees and let the canoe drift. The salt mist was gradually creeping in around them and as though far away they could hear the ringing of the fog-bell at the mouth of the bay. There were no other boats, and shut in by the fog, they both felt a curious sense of intimacy.

"Hear that bell—sounds like a church bell, doesn't it? Perhaps we'd better turn around now, and get near the club-house wharf before the fog gets too heavy."

He turned the canoe and began to paddle slowly down the bay. "What else did the old geezer say?" he demanded.

Jane sat up and brushed the hair out of her eyes. The reaction after her long weeping and despair had set in. Youth is always glad to talk about itself, certain that it is different from all the generations that have gone before. Shut in by the white walls of fog, Jane had a peculiar, detached, impersonal feeling that kept her from being self-conscious, and made it easier for her to talk.

"He said that the portrait of Margery was very bad—and, and he laughed. And he said that I never could be what I wanted, evidently, to be." She paused.

"Well—what else did he say? Go on. Didn't he condescend to say anything encouraging?"

"Oh, yes. He said if I am willing to work and drudge—only he didn't express it that way—I might get somewhere some day, perhaps—but not so awfully far, I guess. And he did say that I might do well in some of the crafts—or interior decorating. It's funny, I used to think of that."

"Great Scott, woman," ejaculated Perry, "what do you expect? To be a Michael Angelo? If you can decorate a room well, that

ought to be something to you. Why, look at those old Italian fellows—look at the way they spent years carving one perfect vase! I believe in making common things beautiful. If I could design one beautiful horse-trough that would bring a sense of beauty to poor ignorant little children and that would refresh tired people going along the street by looking at it, I'd think that I'd accomplished enough for one life." He paused and thanked his stars that Jack was not there to hear his oration. Jack had an unhappy faculty of finding his elder brother's most impressive moments highly amusing and fit subjects for future mirth.

"Besides," he went on, and then stopped short.

"Besides?" Jane asked.

Perry took a long breath. He felt that there were things he must say. "Besides, I have a hunch that the reason you thought most about this scholarship-prize effect was because you wanted to live an independent life, forever, free of all the Watkins. Well, for your mother's sake I'm not so sorry you didn't get it. But if you really want to go on with your work, father would only be too glad to give

you every opportunity. You see, he started out to be an artist himself—and then he went into scientific work—like Morse, you know. But he has always been in hopes that some of us would inherit his artistic talent—but not one of us ever has. It would tickle him to death to have you become an artist.”

Jane was silent; she was thinking: in a few short hours her palace of dreams in which she saw herself the brilliantly successful young artist commencing a career of fame and riches had vanished. Could she bring herself now to take up another career in which patient hard work would be the main thing, and in which showy independence would be replaced by the guidance and help of her resented stepfather?

Perry's voice interrupted her thoughts. “The Irish have a saying,” he remarked meaningly, “that when God closes one door He opens two.”

“All my pet doors seem to close this summer,” said Jane mournfully. “First the wonderful time mother and I were going to have here together in the little cottage—and now everything that the prize was to bring me.”

“There are other doors,” returned Perry,

“and I’m sure that you’d like the door marked ‘Watkins Family.’ Here we are at the wharf—take care! Don’t step on the gunwale! Wait a minute until I catch hold of the wharf. There!”

Jane climbed out of the canoe and stood looking down at her stepbrother. She was too excited and tired to be self-conscious. “Perry,” she said, speaking so fast that the words fairly tripped over each other, “do you remember, in ‘Alice in Wonderland,’ the baby that turned into a pig?”

“Sure,” answered Perry, surprised. “I played the Duchess in a play we had at school when I was a kid.”

“Well,” said Jane, “I’ve decided. You remember the Alice in Wonderland baby made an ugly infant but a handsome pig? I’m going to try to be a *beautiful* pig!”

CHAPTER XVII

DOUBTS

“WELL, once upon a time, Andy, a long, long time ago there lived in Sweden a princess named Elizabeth.”

Margery, seated at the desk in the big living-room close to the veranda door, could hear Polly's voice as she commenced a story to Andrew Watkins. Andrew was insatiable on the subject of stories and Margery smiled to herself as she heard Polly begin. She could see neither Polly nor Andrew from where she sat but she had been present so often at the story-tellings that she knew just how they would be placed; Andrew stretched out flat on the rush rug, his chin cupped in his sunburnt little paws, and Polly curled up in the big wicker chair, her long arms crossed back of her head, and a smile of contentment on her vivid face.

Polly's voice was clear and musical and could be heard distinctly in the living-room; Margery was tired writing letters. With a sigh she put down her pen and leaned back in her chair to listen. She was almost as fond of Polly's stories as was Andrew, and she had supreme faith in her friend's literary ability.

"Polly is going to be a wonderful writer," she had said to her grandfather one day. "And Dick is certain to be a great architect. Everybody seems to be a genius but me."

Her grandfather had smiled at her wistful tone. "Your genius is for life, child," he said, stroking a curl that lay on the shoulder nearest to him. "That's a talent in itself."

"Well, Andrew," Polly's voice went on with the story, "this Princess Elizabeth was very, very pretty. She had great ropes of blond hair, so light and shining that it was almost like silver, and great big eyes, as dark blue as the sea that beat against the shores of her native land, and her cheeks were so pretty and pink that some of the young men of her uncle's court used to write about her rosiness being like the first coming of the dawn. And a great, great many young princes wanted to

marry her. But there was trouble in Sweden at that time; there were different sets of people who wanted to rule the land, and each group wanted to destroy the other group. Now some of the people who loved the Princess Elizabeth were afraid that those who wanted to destroy her uncle and his court would want to kill her, too, so they decided to send her away to America where some other Swedes had already gone, and where they hoped she would be safe and happy.

“But it was a hard and risky thing to get her out of Sweden and they had to go about it in a queer way. They got a great, huge hogshead—that’s like a big barrel, you know—and they put the Princess Elizabeth into it. Then they fastened down the lid, and all the air she had to breathe was what came through the bung-hole. They carried the hogshead down to a vessel that was waiting at the wharf to go to America, and put it aboard. The vessel was not to sail for several days, and there the poor princess had to stay all cramped up in that barrel. How she must have ached from staying so long in one position and how she must have longed to get out and take deep

breaths of fresh air! In fact, she not only had to stay cooped up there in that dreadful hogs-head until the vessel sailed, but until it was well out of sight of land across the North Sea, and free from danger of being overtaken and searched by a ship of the Swedish navy, which might have been warned to be on the watch for a runaway princess.

“Just think, Andrew, how glad she must have been when at last the lid of that old hogs-head was taken off and she was lifted out on the deck, free to move about and breathe all the fresh air she wanted, and to get a good meal, too, for I don’t suppose that they had been able to poke very much food in to her through the bunghole.

“Now, that was away back in 1600 or 1700, and crossing the Atlantic Ocean was very different from what it is now. The ships then were very small, even their big war vessels would seem like little boats to us to-day; and there were no lighthouses then to warn sailors of dangerous rocks and sand bars, or government charts to teach them where lie shoals that may wreck their vessels. So in those days it was a dangerous thing to cross the Atlantic and

a great many people lost their lives in shipwrecks. As the ship carrying the Princess Elizabeth drew near to the New Jersey coast—which even to-day, when they have all sorts of lighthouses to warn mariners, is dangerous because of so many treacherous sand bars—it was overtaken by a storm and wrecked off Cape May.

“I wonder if the Princess Elizabeth thought then of getting back into her hogshead, for she might have floated into shore over the breakers in it. Perhaps she tried to do it. However, that is something we can never know, nor can we ever know what became of the rest of the people on the ship—whether they were all drowned, or whether they were washed up on some other part of that lonely coast. All that we do know is that the Princess Elizabeth reached the shore, alive and safe, but entirely alone.

“I think that she must have been a very scared little princess then, and have wished herself back in Sweden a good many times. For that part of the coast then was lonely and wild, just great stretches of sand and pine-trees, and there were wild animals prowling

there, wolves, and wildcats and bears. And no doubt there were Indians there, too. And the poor little princess had no way of making a fire, for she did not know how to make one the way the woodsmen do, by rubbing two dry sticks together; and even if she had had a fire, she would have had very little to cook—almost nothing, in fact.

“How did she keep alive? Well, you see it must have been summer time, because very few ships attempted to cross the Atlantic then in the winter gales, and in the summer there are always a great many berries growing wild in New Jersey. Fortunately she didn’t pick any that might have poisoned her.

“We know that she did keep alive and didn’t die from hunger or poisoning or fright, for one day it happened that a handsome young man who had gone down into the woods to shoot game suddenly discovered Elizabeth sitting by a little brook, in a thicket of black alder bushes. You can imagine how surprised he must have been to find this lovely young girl, in rich garments all spoiled by sea-water, and torn by brambles, there alone in those remote woods.

“I wonder if the princess knew any Eng-

lish, some princesses were taught foreign languages even in those days, or if she and the young hunter had to communicate with each other by signs. I am sure that if she did that the first sign she made was to point to the game hanging from his shoulder and so let him know that she was hungry. And I am sure that she was very glad to see him and thought that he was the handsomest man that had ever lived,—finer than any prince of her native land—for if he had not found her, sooner or later she must have died of hunger and privation.

“Of course he did not leave her there but took her home with him. That meant a long tramp together, through the lonely forest, until at last they came to the settlement where he lived, and by that time they had decided that they were in love with each other. And so they were married, the Swedish princess and the American hunter.

“They had a long and happy life together, and they prospered and the world went well with them. And the princess was none the worse for her queer experiences, for she lived to be ninety-five.

“ Since then we have not had very many princesses come to our shores, and of those who came none of them ever embarked in a hogs-head. And now, Andy boy, my tale is told.”

“ Is it true, Polly—all of it? ”

Polly hesitated. “ Yes,” she said, “ it is true. Of course, I don’t know exactly that the princess was so pretty, and perhaps the hunter wasn’t as handsome as I said he was—though I am sure he seemed so to her when he found her. But a Swedish princess did land on the coast of New Jersey, just as I said, and the man who found her and married her was named Garrison, and to-day there are a great many Garrisons in New Jersey, all descended from the Princess Elizabeth.”

Margery took up her pen again, and went on with her letters. Her head ached a little and she was tired. There were so many young people about the house all the time, and so much going on, that she was becoming over-excited and she found herself having to fight old faults of petulance and pride, which she thought she had happily thrust aside some time before. If her mother had been there she would have been made to rest for a couple of

days and to allow herself to get the benefit of the health-giving sea air; but as it was she went struggling on, trying to act as a capable hostess and to keep in with all the fun.

Andrew came through the room. "Hello, Margery," he grinned. "Polly's been telling me a dandy story. I have to go home now. What are you doing? Make me some more gollywogs?" He came close to her, jogging her right arm, and a big blot fell on the letter lying before her half-written.

"Andrew," she cried impatiently, "look what you have done!"

Andrew backed off. "I'm sorry," he said and went out, banging the screen-door behind him.

Left alone, Margery threw down her pen. She felt annoyed with Andrew and still more annoyed with herself. "It's no use trying to write," she declared, tearing up her letter and throwing the pieces into the scrap basket. "I might as well go out on the porch and talk to the girls."

Polly and Esther were sitting close together on the big couch-hammock, looking at some sheets of paper Esther held in her hand. They

were both laughing, silent laughter that apparently was not to be overheard, and they were whispering. They were evidently unaware of her presence, and Margery decided to tiptoe up back of them, and after she had surprised them to share the joke.

Slipping off her pumps she stole across the veranda floor, her thin silk stockings making no sound. "Hello," she said in a deep assumed voice, slipping a hand over the eyes of each girl. "What are you two giggling about?"

Neither Polly nor Esther was pleased. They sprang apart, and the papers in Esther's hands fluttered to the floor. "Why did you scare us like that?" demanded Polly testily, and hastily tried to gather together the papers.

Apologetic, Margery bent to pick up one of the papers that had fallen at her feet. As she handed it to Esther she caught sight of her own name on it. "What is up?" she asked. "What is the joke? Do tell me."

Red and embarrassed, Polly and Esther looked at each other.

"We can't," giggled Esther.

"Children should be seen and not heard," declared Polly with affected severity.

Margery flushed. "I think that you might tell me," she said indignantly. "I don't think that it is nice to keep secrets from me—in my own house."

The other girls looked at each other again. They plainly were embarrassed and distressed. "It isn't anything, Margery," Polly said finally. "Just a silly joke. When do we go out in the car?"

"Four o'clock," answered Margery. "I—— Yes, Sarah, I'll be right there." Glad to get away for a moment, she hurried in answer to Sarah's summons. After it was finally settled with Sarah what was to be done about the laundry, Margery went back to the veranda. Polly and Esther were sitting the width of the veranda apart, an expression, half of guilt, half of amusement on each young face.

"You aren't a bit good conspirators," declared Margery. "Why don't you tell me what's up?"

"We can't," answered Esther lamely.

"Perhaps we will some day," said Polly briefly. "Hadn't we better get ready to go now? I saw Walter come out of the garage a minute ago."

Margery was rather quiet as she took her place in the car, but the other girls apparently did not notice anything amiss with her, and after they had stopped for Louisa Merritt, one of the young cottagers with whom a semi-intimacy had sprung up, they chattered away eagerly. But Margery, tired and nervous, found her mind reverting to the little scene on the veranda. She had become tired out, she told herself, trying to make her guests happy and comfortable, and in return they made fun of her behind her back. She had seen them laughing and had seen her name on the paper besides. And more than that, they were keeping a secret from her. The idea hurt her and spoiled her pleasure in the ride.

CHAPTER XVIII

MISHAPS AND HITCHES

“ “ “ I’M dreadin’ what I’ve got to watch,” the Color-Sergeant said,’ ” quoted Polly with a laugh.

Margery carefully slipped a mass of fluffy pink ruffles over her head. “ I hope that their mustaches drop off and that they forget their lines,” she said. “ The catastrophes—all the mishaps and hitches—are the only part of amateur theatricals that I enjoy. Ouch!—oh, Esther, quick!—this hook has caught in my hair! ”

Esther flew to extricate her. “ Serves you right for being so cruel,” she laughed as she slipped the hook of Margery’s pink frock out of the strand of golden hair in which it had caught. “ I always suffer so in sympathy for the poor actors that I can’t enjoy a minute of the play. There—your hair looks all right—

don't touch it. Turn around and I'll fasten you up the back."

The three girls were dressing for the theatricals to be held at the yacht club that evening. They had come in from the long automobile ride too late to dress before dinner, and they were hurrying now in order to reach the club early and secure places near the front where they could see all that went on on the stage, and especially see all that Jack did or failed to do. Perry, Sam and Dick, who were to escort the girls, were already waiting for them down-stairs in the big living-room.

"Oh, do hurry," urged Esther, who had been the first one to be dressed. "Put on your slippers, Marge, while I fasten Polly's girdle." She cast a backward glance at her little yellow frock reflected in the long cheval-glass and skipped across the room to Polly, who with fingers that trembled with haste and excitement was vainly trying to finish putting on her soft white frock.

"There," cried Margery, throwing down her shoe-horn. "We're ready. Yes, boys," she called down the stairway. "We're coming at last."

The hall was filling fast as the girls and boys entered, but they managed to find places near the front where they could catch echoes of the bustle and excitement going on behind the scenes and imagine they recognized the eyes that kept appearing at the peep-hole in the curtain.

"There's Jack, I know," cried Esther. "And, my goodness, what's that?" as a bump and a faint scream came to their ears.

"I wonder where Jane is," said Polly, twisting her neck to look at the people coming in through the door. "She promised to be sure and be here."

Perry stood up and looked. "She isn't in that crowd," he announced. "It's getting near the fateful hour."

"Perhaps one of you boys had better go for her," suggested Polly.

"I'll go," said Perry and Dick in a breath, but Dick got out first.

As he neared the door, Jane came hurrying in breathlessly. "Am I late?" she asked. "Hello, Perry," with a smile of understanding at her stepbrother. "You see, I did come."

Margery was bewildered; Perry and Jane

to be on such apparently good terms! She turned to Polly; but Jane on entering had tossed Polly a folded piece of paper, which she had opened and showed to Dick, who bent over it absorbed.

A little absently, Margery leaned back in her chair and smoothed down the pale pink ruffles billowing about her. "Was this some more of the mystery?" she asked herself.

"Margery," said a voice in her ear. She turned; Jack, dressed as a country boy in high boots and overalls and an old flannel shirt, had come out from behind the scenes. "Katherine wants you," he whispered. "Come on—the curtain is going up in a minute."

Obediently Margery rose and accompanied him back of the stage.

"How do you like my make-up?" asked Jack, turning an astonishingly red face toward her. "I don't dare to breathe for fear I'll wipe this paint off my face. Aren't the girls sights when you're close to them?"

Margery, catching sight of Mary Benton, laughed, for Mary, with great blue circles painted under her eyes, her cheeks purple red and her nose whitened like a marshmallow,

looked absurdly different from her usual sun-burnt self.

"Oh, kiddie," cried Katherine, rushing up to Margery, her hair tightly screwed back from her face into a hard little knob at the back of her head, and carrying a curly wig in her hand. "Won't you be the open fire and the prompter? Elsie Maclaren was to have been—but she fainted. Did you hear the bump when she went down? My dear, I never was so scared in my life!"

Margery gasped. "Open fire—will I be the open fire? Katherine, what do you mean?"

"I mean, will you look after the fireplace we have arranged for the proposal scene," explained Katherine impatiently, her nerves having reached the acute stage apparently inseparable from amateur theatricals.

She led the way to the pasteboard fireplace, and showed Margery the lantern covered with an old red sweater which was to provide the rosy firelight needed to add color to the proposal scene.

"See," she said, "you have to watch the lantern to see that it doesn't go up,—and don't let the sweater scorch! And then, you're to

hold the book on your knees and prompt us whenever we need it—which will be about every two minutes, I'm afraid. Now, Jack—don't forget, for pity sakes, to give me the cue to come in during the second act. And, Jack!—for goodness sake don't forget that in the last act after you've left the stage by the door on the right hand side that you'll have to climb out of the window and go around the building so as to be able to come in by the door at the left-hand side of the stage! You be *sure* and see that he gets off in time, Margery. Now, don't forget, Jack!”

“Yeth, ma'am,” answered Jack with ostentatious meekness, and Katherine disappeared.

“What does she mean?” asked Margery.

“Oh, there isn't any way of getting round behind the scenes from one side of the stage to the other. So in the last act I have to climb out of a window on this side, and scoot around the back of the building and climb in the window on the other side, so as to be able to come in that door on the left-hand side of the stage. It's a beastly nuisance, but it can't be helped. You see this isn't a real stage—just a make-shift platform we built ourselves with the help

of the janitor. Better crawl into that fireplace now and attend to your lantern."

Margery glanced at the fireplace with disfavor. It looked very hot and uncomfortable and she disliked getting her dainty organdy frock mussed and soiled. Besides, she would be away from Polly and the others and so miss all the fun.

"I'll be a sight for the dance afterward," she commented.

Jack was sympathetic. "Sure, it's a shame," he said. "I wanted Katherine to have Perry to do it—but she said that he is too big and clumsy. I'll come and talk to you whenever I can—and fan you," he promised. "I've got to go now. The curtain is going up this minute and I'm supposed to be on the stage when she goes!"

In no very cheerful mood, Margery gathered her fleecy pink skirts about her and crawling into the fireplace tucked herself out of sight from the audience. The lantern made the place stiflingly hot, and she disliked the smell from the burning oil so close under her nose. With a sigh she spread the prompt-book out on her knee.

It was a warm thunderous evening, and Margery had only the consolation of knowing that the actors were as uncomfortable as she. The play was one of an old-fashioned New England winter, and the wretched members of the caste were bundled up in all the heavy wintry-looking clothes that they had been able to muster. Mary Benton had on her mother's heavy automobile coat and a set of furs begged from one of the year-round inhabitants of Wyanoke, and the boys were all wearing overcoats and sweaters. Salt, to represent snow, had been liberally sprinkled over the heads and shoulders of those who were to enter from the blizzard supposed to be raging outside. In the heat the salt melted and added its stickiness to the discomfort they were already enduring.

Margery, her eyes more on the row of her friends in the audience than on the performers, saw that Polly and Dick were convulsed over something that was happening on the stage. Transferring her attention back to the actors she was in time to see Jack in the midst of a long speech on the rigors of the snow-storm and painfulness of his own half-frozen state, unconsciously scratching a mosquito bite on his

ankle, while the perspiration visibly glistened on his heated face.

The curtain fell at last, and Margery, rather white and exhausted, crawled out of the fireplace for a few minutes' rest and fresh air.

"You blessed child," cried Katherine, catching sight of her, "you must be used up! Jack!—get her some ice-water. Oh dear, there's the bell for to be on the stage! Now Margery, be sure to remember that Jack is to climb out of the window and run round to the other side of the building so as to come in by the left-hand stage door! He's so harum-scarum—he's just as likely as not to forget!"

Margery nodded and gripped the prompt-book tighter. She had forgotten about Jack's entrances and exits required by the exigencies of the plot of the play. She envied him now his chance to breathe the cool night air. The oily fumes of the imitation open fire suffocated her, and she did not dare to draw back from it, for the lantern was out of order, and by perpetually going up threatened to set the sweater on fire.

The curtains parted and the second act began. It seemed hotter than ever in the little

fireplace, and Margery, at the end of the first ten minutes, found that her foot had gone to sleep.

"Well, this is too much," she exclaimed to herself indignantly and leaned forward to pinch and prod her ankle.

The prompt-book slid from her lap with a thud. "Gracious," she thought, and reached forward after it, almost upsetting the lantern.

Jack started at the noise, floundered, forgot his lines, and turned despairingly toward Margery for help. Margery, frantically searching through the recovered book, could not find the place.

"Make it up—you'll have to make it up," she whispered shrilly.

"What?" asked Jack, forgetting in his panic to act at all.

The audience laughed. The hitch furnished some excitement and people were beginning to enjoy themselves thoroughly.

Margery grew hot and cold, and afterward never would believe that it was only a moment or two before Jack recovered himself and went on with the play. It seemed hours to her.

The door behind her opened and someone from the audience slipped in.

She half turned her head; then, afraid of another mishap, kept her eyes resolutely on the book.

"Hello," whispered Dick.

"Hello," whispered Margery back. "Don't make me lose my place again. Oh, Dick—did it seem so very bad when Jack got stuck and I couldn't help him?"

Dick chuckled and sat down on the floor behind her. "I think that the audience enjoyed that more than any other part of the play," he said. "But until I saw you reach for the book I didn't know where you were—thought the girls had you back in the dressing-rooms to help them. Phew!—it must be hot in there—get out, and I'll do the cooking act."

"Oh, Dick," sighed Margery, "I'm so hot and tired—and so bored. But you can't get in here—you're too big."

Dick laughed. "It does look that way," he agreed, as he tried to force his broad shoulders into the aperture and stuck. "Wait a minute."

He disappeared, to return with a newspaper

in his hand just as Jack came off the stage. "Hello, Jack—why didn't you make it more comfortable for Margery?" he demanded. "Couldn't you have fanned her, at least?" Sitting down cross-legged on the floor behind the fireplace he began to fan Margery so vigorously with the newspaper that the lantern threatened to go out.

Jack was honestly repentant. "Great Scott, Margery, I never gave you a thought," he said frankly. "To tell the truth," he added gloomily, "I haven't got the brains of a hop-toad to-night. Did you ever see a worse mess than I made of that speech?"

"Oh, Jack," Margery whispered, "I'm so sorry—it was all my fault for losing the place."

"Yes, I know it was," Jack concurred, still gloomy. "I wasn't going to say anything to you—but as you know it yourself, anyway,—I suppose I might as well."

Margery was silent. She had not expected Jack to agree with her so promptly. "It was his fault, too—partly," she whispered indignantly to Dick.

"Anything I can do for you, Marge?" asked Jack dejectedly.

"Oh, Jack, could you get me some water—I heard Katherine say that there was some in the boys' dressing-room. Or never mind—Dick can go for it."

"Dick doesn't know the way."

Still despondent over his recent failure, Jack withdrew.

"Dick," whispered Margery suddenly, keeping an anxious eye on the prompt-book, "is there anything queer going on?"

"Queer going on?" asked Dick amazed. "What do you mean?"

"About me, I mean. Everybody is queer. Polly and Esther——" She stopped, her pride rebelling at confessing what had distressed her.

"How do you mean 'queer'?" inquired Dick, a twinkle in his eye.

"Oh, I don't know," parried Margery, having trouble in explaining. It was hard, she found, to put her doubts and suspicions into words. "Shh, there's Katherine looking at us—I guess we're making too much noise."

They were silent.

"Dick," asked Margery a moment later, "do you smell something burning?"

"It's that sweater over the lantern, I think. Take care," as Margery attempted to move it. "*Take care!* You almost put yourself on fire then."

Dick reached in a long arm, and with his jack-knife managed, with Margery's help, to saw off the scorching portion of the sweater, which he carried to the window and dropped out on the grass beneath.

"Dick," whispered Margery frantically, "where *is* Jack? I forgot all about him!—Your going to the window reminded me! Oh, where is he? Do go and see! Quick! Quick!"

Dick stared at her. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"Jack! We must get him! He's gone to get me some water!"

"Great Scott! Do you feel faint? Never mind—I'll get you some water! Brace up! Brace up now!"

"No, no, no! Of course I'm not faint! Get Jack! Oh Jack!" she whispered shrilly as Jack came sauntering nonchalantly toward them with a glass of water in his hand. "Jack! Quick!"

"Here's the water," said Jack, handing it to her. "Sorry I was so long. It's so hot to-night that my make-up was coming off and I got some ——"

Margery interrupted him. "It's almost time for you to go on the stage—from the other side! What *will* you do? You're too late to climb out of the window! What will you do!"

"He'll have to climb out of the window," said Dick.

"He can't—he never can get all the way round the club-house, and through that window and down the hall!" Margery fairly wrung her hands in her distress. "Oh, what will we do?"

"You're a nice one," grumbled Jack. "You were to start me off in time."

Margery had crawled out of the fireplace, leaving the lantern and the actors on the stage to their fate, and stood silent before Jack, a small pink monument of guilt. "He's got to get there somehow," she faltered.

"Of course he has!" answered Jack himself. "But how? By flying over the stage or crawling under it?"

"You've said it," remarked Dick quietly. "Crawl under the stage—you might have been there now if you hadn't wasted so much time talking. If you go quickly it won't take you as long as it would to go out of the window and round the house."

"But, Dick, he can't," objected Margery. "The stage is only about a foot from the floor, and he will stick!"

"Can't help it—it's the only way for him to get there."

"He'll never do it," and Margery tossed her hands dramatically toward the ceiling.

But Jack had already started.

Fairly holding their breath, the others listened to the strange bumping and thumpings that came from under the stage. With praiseworthy self-control, the actors on the stage went on with their parts, apparently unconscious of the racket under their feet.

"He's half-way across," whispered Margery. "Hear him."

"He's almost there," answered Dick. "Great Scott—is he stuck? No, he's all right!"

They listened anxiously.

"I have loved you since I first saw you." Mr. Martin, the leading man, gave the cue for Jack's entrance.

A bumping under the stage followed.

"Jack would never have gotten there if he had gone around the house," murmured Dick. "He would have stuck climbing that wire fence by the kitchen."

Mr. Martin waited, surprised. "I have loved you since I first saw you," he repeated.

He waited again. "I have loved you since I first saw you," he said sternly. The thumping under the stage increased in volume, but still no Jack.

Mr. Martin grew peremptory. "I have loved you since I first saw you," he shouted.

The audience once more was amused. "What's that funny noise?" people began to ask.

"I have loved you since the first time I ever saw you," cried Mr. Martin entreatingly.

"I have loved you," he began again, now thoroughly upset.

The door at the left opened, and Jack, covered with dust, rushed in.

"Well," said Margery as, the play over at

last, she joined Polly and the others, “never again will I say that the only part of amateur theatricals that I enjoy are the mishaps and hitches.”

CHAPTER XIX

POOR KATIE

THE big mastiff Waldo padded up the stairs to Margery's room. It was late and the dog evidently felt that his young mistress should be stirring. Putting his paws on the edge of the bed he reared himself up and barked, three loud booming barks.

Margery opened startled, sleepy eyes. "Gracious, you old thing," she exclaimed, sitting up, her curls lying loose on her shoulders. "Get down—get down at once, sir. What will Sarah say to your dusty feet on that clean sheet? Charge, Waldo, charge!"

Waldo crouched obediently, and watched her with adoring eyes, his ears cocked and his tail thumping the floor. Margery leaned out of the bed and patted him affectionately on the head. "You're a nice old thing—yes, you are."

She settled back on the pillow and with her

arm under her head lay dreamily watching the gay chintz curtain fluttering in the wind that blew, fresh and cool, in from the sea.

Through the open doorway of the room next to hers she could see Polly's brown head buried in the pillow. She knew that she ought to get up and waken Polly, but she was pleasantly languid after the play and dance of the night before and she enjoyed lying there on her comfortable bed living over again the fun and excitement, seeing again the ballroom bright with lights, hearing the orchestra, feeling herself flying over the smooth, level floor.

She laughed a little, and patted Waldo's head as she thought of her trials and adventures in the fireplace and of how glad she had been when the curtain went down and she had been able to join Polly and the others. Startled at her pallor and air of weariness they had taken her out to a cool corner of the veranda, fanned her and given her lemonade while Esther's deft fingers had straightened her ruffles and smoothed her hair. By the time the ballroom had been cleared of the chairs set for the play, and the dancing had commenced, Margery, rested and refreshed, was ready for

the fun. Always popular, she had had even more than her usual number of partners and share of attention.

But young as she was, Margery had the happy faculty of not forgetting others in the midst of her own enjoyment, or of losing her head in the excitement of her small triumphs. In spite of the exhilaration of her popularity she had taken the time and thought to make sure that her guests were equally provided with partners and to see that the boys were all introduced to Jane.

"Perry," she had asked as they finished a one-step, "have you and Jane made things up?"

"Well, not definitely—but we're improving. I ran across her yesterday on the rocks—she seemed pretty blue and out of sorts, so I took her out in the canoe—and we had rather a good talk. But to-night when I asked her for dances I got only one—and Jack didn't get any at all."

"Oh, dear! I wish I hadn't introduced a single boy to her! Jane doesn't know as many people here as the rest of us do, so I made a special point of introducing the lads to her."

It was with the intention of giving Jane a gentle scolding that Margery had beckoned to her at supper-time.

"Jane," she had begun as Dick and Sam went off to get them some ice-cream.

"Oh, Margery," Jane had interrupted, her lips quivering, "I've wanted all day to see you! I have something dreadful to tell you! The portrait didn't get the prize, or come anywhere near it. I am so sorry to have made you pose all those mornings!"

Margery had been all sympathy at once. "Why, why—you little goosie-dear—you are not caring, are you?"

Jane nodded, too big a lump in her throat to speak.

"Why, honey-child, what chance did you really think you had with all those experienced students—I think that you were wonderful to try at all. I'm so glad that you did try, though, for it gave me a chance to know you! And we did have fun over the posing—you know we did! Besides, you had the practice of painting, and you can't get anywhere in anything without practice."

Jane smiled. "Well, I'm glad that you

don't care—that's what made me feel so bad to-day—I had rather got over caring for myself, but I was afraid that you might be disappointed. Here come the boys—look at the huge plates of ice-cream they have!"

Margery, thinking over these things, grew dreamy, and had almost dozed off to sleep, when she heard the shade in the next room go up with a bang, and Polly's cheerful voice caroling a tuneless song.

"Oh, Waldo," she murmured sleepily, "Polly is so energetic and I do feel so drowsy." She yawned, and her eyes closed. "Oh, Waldo, I ought to get up—I, I ——"

Something wet hit her face and she opened her eyes to see Polly and Esther dressed and standing beside her bed.

"Gracious, what was that?" she asked sleepily. "Sw—pht," she sputtered as the wet sponge in Polly's hand descended on her face again. "Polly, you rascal!"

"Hurry up, sleepy head," said Esther. "It's breakfast time!"

Margery sat up. "All right—I'll be ready in a jiffy."

Polly and Esther went down, and singing,

Margery bounded out of bed and turned on the water in the bath-tub.

“Bad luck to sing before breakfast, Miss Margery,” said Sarah, stopping at the door. “‘Sing before breakfast, cry before night,’ you know.”

Margery laughed. “Now, Sarah!”

Sarah was offended. “All right, Miss Margery—you mark my words.”

Kind and indulgent as he was, Mr. Morris had certain rules to which he demanded strict adherence. Chief among these was punctuality to meals, and Margery, although she was naturally inclined to laziness in the morning, had grown to be very careful about being on time for breakfast. Now she dashed through the process of dressing; brushed back her curls with a hasty dab of the brush, slipped into a straight little frock with few buttons to fasten, and not stopping to get her morning shoes out of the cupboard, put on the slippers she had worn the evening before.

“Oh, dear,” she thought, as she ran down the stairs, “these precious white slippers have stretched horribly. I’ll never be able to wear them to another dance—why, they’re so loose

at the heel that I can scarcely keep them on now!"

She found Mrs. Endicott in the dining-room. "Good-morning, Margery dear," Mrs. Endicott began rather hurriedly, "I just stopped in to speak to you about that concert of Miss Prentice's this afternoon. I have had news about some of my property that will take me to the city this morning—I think I would better see a lawyer about it. But I will be back in Winchester in plenty of time to take you to the concert. And Katherine is very anxious to go to the country club there to-night—I thought if I am not too tired you girls might stay with me and we will all have dinner at the club together. We will come home early."

"Oh, Aunt Kate—we'd love to. Where shall we meet you? And what ought we to wear? Do you think my pink voile is good enough?"

"Plenty," laughed Mrs. Endicott. "Remember, meet me at half-past three at the entrance of the Brightwood. And, Mr. Morris, if these girls are not home by half-past five or a quarter of six, you will know that they have

stayed to dinner with me. Good-by—I must fly!”

“Was the dance a success last night?” asked Mr. Morris, as with a wave of her hand Mrs. Endicott withdrew.

“Oh yes, indeed, grandpapa—we did have such a good time. I wish that you had been there. I’m sure you would have enjoyed watching some of the dancing—it was so funny! There was one girl that danced just like this.”

Eager to amuse her grandfather, Margery jumped up and danced around the table. In her high spirits she grew reckless; suddenly her foot turned in her loose slipper, she stumbled and, falling against a chair, knocked it violently through the glass front of the built-in china closet and shattered a row of valuable cups and plates.

“Oh, grandpapa!” Margery’s eyes were wide with horror. “Look what I have done!”

Mr. Morris rose and put on his glasses the better to inspect the wreckage. “I only wish they were mine,” he said quietly. “I told the agent when we rented this cottage that I wanted all these valuable things taken away.

But it wasn't done, and as there was no other place to put them, I let them stay. That's the worst of renting the house of an artist and collector—there are too many costly things to take care of."

Breakfast over, Polly and Esther went off to write home letters and Margery sat on the wide veranda with her grandfather. She felt somewhat subdued.

"It *was* 'Sing before breakfast, cry before night!'" she called to Sarah, passing by in the hall.

Sarah came to the door. "Mr. Morris," she began excitedly, "it's Katie that's in sorrow and throuble."

"Why, what has happened? Has Katie broken something, too?"

"It's her brother that's been killed on the railroad."

"Her brother? Dear me, that is sad."

"It's on the railroad he was killed. An' his wife's wantin' Katie—an' her up-stairs crying her eyes out. An' seein' no way of gettin' to the funeral."

"Why, she must go to the funeral, of course, poor girl. Where did her brother live?"

“At Bridgefield, sir. There’s a boat at four from Winchester—perhaps it’s that she could be takin’.”

“Very well—I’ll engage reservations for her.”

“I’ll do it for you, grandpapa,” cried Margery, eager to atone for the broken china-closet. “I’ll do it for you—the nearest telephone is at the yacht club. I’ll run down for you.”

“Very well, dear, you had better go at once. And while you are there, telephone to old Mrs. Maris and her daughter and offer them the use of the car this afternoon. If you girls are all going to be at Winchester this afternoon, they may as well have it.”

The wire to the steamship office was busy, and Margery, filling in time at the club-house until she could get her connection, was glad to see Mary Benton.

“Hello, Marge,” said Mary airily, “come and take a sail with me. I’ve persuaded Perry into letting me borrow his boat—the *Prudent Sally*—whenever I want it. Perry’s a regular old granny about that precious boat of his.”

"I'd love to go with you, Mary, but I am waiting for a telephone call."

"You'll wait a long time," laughed Mary. "Look who's there 'phoning to some poor girl."

Margery glanced toward the telephone booth, and saw Mr. Vanderslice, the club bore, and notoriously long-winded, ensconced. "Oh, dear," she said.

"'Oh, dear,'" mocked Mary. "Come on, we'll just go across the bay and back. Don't get to be like Perry—a regular granny. I believe I'd go and jump off the dock in despair if I were as timid as these boys here are."

The handsome, swaggering girl glanced at the young man standing by the door, who was plainly admiring her, laughed, and, seizing Margery by the arm, said, "Come on, granny, come on."

The little sail across the smooth bay was pleasant, and Margery almost forgot the incident of the broken dishes, and her depression over poor Katie's tragedy in her delight in the great fluffy white clouds, the sunshine, and the blue water.

"There, I got you back safely, granny,"

said Mary as they came back to the wharf. "Now go and telephone."

The telephone was again in use, and Margery sat down to wait. But it was not until luncheon time when Mr. Morris asked her what arrangements she had made for Katie that she thought of the telephone again; for as she waited little Andrew Watkins was brought to her, his hand badly cut from a piece of loose slate on the boat-house road where he had been playing. The sight of blood always made her sick and faint, but she managed to escort Andy to the doctor, and then, although white and feeling rather wobbly as to knees, to take him to his home. There she found Katherine Endicott wanting her aid and advice as to a fair she was getting up, and after stopping for Esther and Polly they all went down in the village to make purchases.

"Oh, grandpapa," Margery cried as Mr. Morris reminded her of Katie, "I'm so sorry, I forgot. I couldn't get the 'phone, and then Andy cut his hand, and then—well, the whole morning just slipped away! I'll go right now!"

This time there were fewer people about the

club, and she had no trouble in 'phoning, although she was unable to make really satisfactory arrangements for Katie.

"Oh, dear," she sighed as she climbed slowly up the hill, "I suppose poor Katie may have to sit up on the deck all night. It's too bad when she's feeling so sad anyway."

She grew conscious that she herself was very tired and that the tears were near the surface. "I don't feel so awfully happy," she thought. "I feel as though I want something, but I don't know what."

What she did want was to be put to bed for a long nap, but she was too tired and nervous to recognize that, besides the thought of Katie drove her on.

"Do you know, girls," she said to Polly and Esther after luncheon, "I believe that I had better go over to Winchester with Katie and see her off. Something might be wrong with the tickets—and I'd never forgive myself if she didn't get off all right after the way I forgot to telephone. So I'm afraid I won't be able to go to the concert with you. Don't say anything to grandpapa—it might worry him, but I think that I had better do it."

“Well, of course, I suppose you ought to do it,” answered Polly cheerfully. “It would be bad if Katie didn’t get off, under all the circumstances. Of course we’ll miss you,” she added perfunctorily.

Margery drew back. “I think you might at least pretend you’ll miss me,” she cried, frankly hurt.

Polly slipped her arm around Margery’s waist. “We do, chick-a-biddy, we do. It’s just that we have some errands to do in Winchester—some important errands.” She caught Esther’s eye, and they both burst into uncontrollable giggles.

“Oh dear, Margery, don’t look at me like that—it’s just something so funny—I’ll tell you some day, maybe!”

The girls stopped laughing abruptly, and Margery, her lips quivering, went out of the room in search of Katie.

“I’m never, never going to love anyone again,” she said to herself wrathfully. “I—I cared such a lot about Polly and Esther, and look at the way they are acting!”

She found Katie putting her clothes into a pathetic bundle tied with a piece of rope. “I’ll

lend you a valise, Katie," she said kindly, " and I'm going to the boat with you to see that you get off all right."

Comforted somewhat by the gratitude in Katie's half-drowned eyes, she paused. " Well, Katie cares for me, anyway," she thought, " even if the others don't."

Struck by a sudden idea, she said aloud, " If I can find somebody with a sailboat, I'll come out and wave to you as the boat goes past the point. Be sure and look out for me!"

She went back to the other girls. " We must be more careful what we say before Margery," she heard Polly say severely to Esther, as she drew near the door.

Margery bent and retied her shoestrings, while she coughed discreetly. " I do wish that I'd stop overhearing things," she thought despairingly. " I'll have to wear ear-mufflers and ring a dinner-bell wherever I go."

CHAPTER XX

ON THE WHARF

THE wind from the sea sent little waves slapping against the pilings of the long, narrow wharf belonging to the yacht club. Jane, standing at the end of the dock to speak to the club janitor about the lobsters he had promised to procure for Cousin Willy, had hard work to keep on her big, broad-brimmed black hat.

“Looks like a squall a-comin’?” remarked the man, as he finished tying his dory and moved along toward the shore.

Jane nodded absently. She had seen Mr. Hodge that morning, and after a long talk with him she had formed a new resolution. She would give up her dreams of immediate fame and fortune; the thought of “Miss Gale, the famous artist,” was to be stowed away in some mental pigeonhole and forgotten, and she would start all over again, taking up her work humbly and earnestly. That it meant drudg-

ery she recognized, and infinite patience; but she felt happier than she had done when her mind was given over to feverish dreams.

“I’ll have to work and work,” she thought, her eyes following a speeding motor-boat. “And even then, I mayn’t amount to so awfully much. But anyway, I’m going to keep on trying, and trying—like Margery with her swimming.” She smiled as she thought of Margery trying again and again to master some difficult stroke; struggling, splashing, gasping, sinking, but keeping on until at last she had succeeded.

“It will be more Plain Jane than ever,” she thought, “for it will be Plain Jane the Hard Worker. I wish I could see Perry and tell him that I’ve got over my silly fit of the other day.”

She sighed as she thought of Perry. She liked him so much that she regretted she could not know him as an individual, and not as a stepbrother. “The Watkins boys really are ever so nice,” she said to herself. “I’d love to know them if it wasn’t for their awful father.” She sighed again as she thought of her stepfather.

Turning back to the land, she was surprised to see Perry standing half-way down the long wharf, talking to a girl. Jane hesitated. The coat she had on, while light and warm, was one of Cousin Willy's most extreme bargains, and was several sizes too large for her and of a vivid and large green and white check. Recognizing the girl as Mary Benton she decided to wait until she had moved away. Her back to the sea she stood watching Perry and Mary and thinking what an effective picture they made against the dark gray sky; two vivid, strong, tall young creatures, Perry in the white flannels and heavy white sweater he so often wore, and Mary in a yellow oil-skin slicker and cap.

A group of men joined the others, fat, youngish men down from the city for the weekend; a set particularly detested by Jane. Seeing that they were likely to stand chatting for some time she concluded not to wait any longer.

As she came up to the group she saw by the hot color in Perry's cheeks that he was embarrassed and annoyed. The older men were also plainly chuckling over his discomfiture. Mary

nodded casually to Jane, and went on with her talk with Perry.

“Really, Perry, I think that you are horrid,” she protested with a killing sidelong glance from her dark eyes at the group of men. “Here you go and tell me to use your old boat any day I feel like it—and then when I do want to use it, you say I can’t.”

“You’re welcome to the *Prudent Sally* any time that you want her, Mary,” protested Perry. “I only objected because a squall is coming!”

“And when I ask you to come out with me,” went on Mary, not heeding his words, “you won’t even do that.”

“I told you, Mary, it’s just because a squall’s coming,” repeated Perry vehemently.

Mary laughed, and the group of men echoed her amusement. “The wind is blowing—but you don’t want to go sailing in a dead calm, do you?”

“Hmm,” murmured Perry, inarticulately.

“I believe that you’re afraid,” teased the girl with a laughing glance at the men. They laughed too. It was amusing to see the pretty girl “kidding” the boy, and they admired her

vivacity. Especially as it was not themselves that her high spirits were likely to involve in a wetting.

"You may get a little spray on you—perhaps those beautiful white clothes will shrink," Mary protested.

The men laughed again. "Jove, but she's a pretty girl," one of them remarked in a low voice; not too low for Mary to hear him.

Jane stepped forward hastily. "Perry," she had begun, when Margery joined the group.

"Hello, Perry, hello everybody," Margery said listlessly.

Mary turned to her gayly. "Hello, Margie," she cried, "I'm ever so glad to see you! Come for a sail with me?"

Margery hesitated and looked at Jane.

"Oh, come on," said Mary impatiently. "Perry's afraid because the wind is a little brisk. But you're a good sport, Margie! Come on. I'm only going down to the mouth of the bay and back—come on. It will be glorious. I'm crazy to have you," she added with a sudden smile that was very winning.

Jane, watching Margery, was surprised at

the look of pleasure that flashed across her face. "Do you really want me?" she asked. "I'd love to go with you. Besides, I want to go out and wave to Katie—she's on the *Mermaid*, and I promised her I would if I could."

Perry turned to her. "Look here, Margery," he protested, "there's a storm coming—I wouldn't go if I were you."

Mary screwed up her face in an absurd grimace. "Oh, don't pay any attention to him, Margie—he's just an old-stick-in-the-mud."

The men laughed again, more at Mary's comical expression than at her words. "I want you, even if Perry doesn't," she went on with another teasing glance at Perry.

Margery jumped down on the bow of the boat. "I'm all ready," she said.

Perry drew near to the edge of the wharf. "See here, Margery," he expostulated, "you oughtn't to go! I'll go, but I don't want you to go!"

Again Jane was surprised at Margery's expression. "Why, she looks as though her feelings were hurt," she thought. "Margery," she called, "Perry doesn't mean—he's ——"

But Margery did not hear her. Mary had joined her in the boat and was untying the painter.

“Good-bye, little one,” cried Mary, with a wave of her hand to Perry. The boat slid away from the wharf.

“Plague,” cried Perry, and with a flying leap landed on the deck.

The *Prudent Sally* sped down the bay toward the open sea, and Jane went back to the club-house feeling both anxious and depressed. She did not want to join the party, neither did she like not being asked. Wondering what Esther and Polly were doing, but feeling too shy to go in search of them, she went home, and exchanging her big, black hat for a small scarlet cloth tam-o'-shanter, she took a steamer-rug and sofa-pillows and went down to the rocks. There on the lea side of a big boulder she spread the rug and stretched herself out to read. Far out in the bay she could see a white sailboat scudding before the wind and she wondered if it was the *Prudent Sally* and how the sailors were faring.

Her book was interesting and presently she had forgotten everything else in its absorbing

pages. Suddenly something cold and wet splashed upon her cheek. She sat up and looked about her; it was raining.

"Well, Perry was right," she thought as she scrambled to her feet and hastily gathered her belongings together. "Won't Mary be mad? It's blowing hard, too!"

It was pouring by the time Jane reached the cottage. "Hello, Cousin Willy," she called to her cousin who was busy pulling up awnings and closing windows. "I very nearly got soaked. I was so busy reading that I didn't notice the rain coming." She went to the window. "Why, you can't see a thing of the bay—it's raining so! Margery and Perry went out sailing—I do hope that they get back in time!"

"Of course they would turn back and come in. How nervous you are getting, child. Speaking of being nervous, I'm rather upset about your mother. From the papers it certainly does look as though there would be war in Europe—and if so, your mother may have difficulty in getting away!"

"Oh, Cousin Willy!"

"Yes, though, of course, your mother's be-

ing an American citizen will make a difference. I don't trust those Germans—I never did like them."

Worried, Jane picked up a newspaper and studied the staring headlines. War and her mother over there! Why, it was just time for them to be landing at Hamburg now!

"Don't look so anxious, Jane," expostulated Cousin Willy, taking the paper away from her. "They will be all right."

The rain poured down steadily and the little sitting-room grew so dark that Cousin Willy lighted the lamp. "Almost time for supper," she remarked, folding up her sewing.

Jane wandered to the window and looked out. She was worried about her mother, and restless, and the gray, rain-swept bay depressed her. "Wouldn't it be horrid to be out there in a little open boat?" she thought, drumming her fingers against the glass. "I do hope Margery got back in time to avoid the storm! She's such a dear! I wonder what was wrong with her?—she didn't look as happy as usual."

"I think we're in for a storm," said Cousin

Willy. "Did you say, Jane, that Margery had gone out sailing?"

"Yes," answered Jane. "Cousin Willy, I am going out on an errand—I won't be long."

Going into the little hall she took down her mackintosh from its peg.

CHAPTER XXI

“ WHERE IS MARGERY? ”

“ SARAH,” asked Jane at the front door of the Morris cottage, “ is Miss Margery at home? ”

“ No, Miss Jane, she’s went to Winchester with Mrs. Endicott. Mrs. Endicott says this morning not to expect them if they are not back by half-past five.”

“ But, Sarah—I don’t believe Miss Margery went to Winchester—I saw her down on the wharf this afternoon.”

“ Oh, yes, Miss Jane—I’m sure she did. Perhaps it was later she went, but it’s sure I am that she did.”

“ Won’t you ask Mr. Morris? ”

Sarah departed rather unwillingly and came back a few minutes later to say that Mr. Morris was positive that Margery had gone to Winchester.

Outside in the pouring rain Jane stood thinking, forgetting in her anxiety to open her umbrella. Should she go to Mrs. Endicott's house and ask for Perry? How silly and anxious she would seem if everything was all right and Margery and Perry had come in long ago! And where would it lead her in connection with the Endicotts—would they take it as a sign that she had definitely given up all opposition to becoming one of the Watkins clan? Might they not take too much for granted?

A gust of wind swept in from the sea, whipping her hair into her eyes. Jane shuddered; how would a frail sailboat fare should it chance to be out in such a squall?

She ran down the road toward the Endicotts'. The rain was pouring down fiercely and beating against the door. The maid who answered Jane's ring was plainly annoyed at having to face the storm and answered her questions briefly.

Mr. Perry was out—had been out since luncheon. No, she didn't know when he would be back. She didn't think that he would be home for dinner. Mrs. Endicott had said that nobody but Andrew would be in for dinner.

"May I see Andrew, please?" demanded Jane, edging past the maid into the big living-room and hall combined. "Tell him it's Jane Gale, and that I must see him about something very important."

The maid disappeared and Jane stood waiting, the water running off her raincoat to the polished floor. "Of course, Margery is all right," she kept assuring herself, "of course she is."

There was a patter of rubber-soled shoes on the bare floors, and Andrew came running in from the kitchen where he had been spending a sociable half-hour with the cook.

"Hello, Jane," he grinned.

"Andy, dear, do you know where Perry is?"

"Yep—he's gone with Jack to Winchester."

"When did he go?"

"I don't know—after lunch, I think. I wish everybody hadn't gone away—it's so lonely here. Can't you stay, Jane?"

"No, dear, not to-day. But you are sure you haven't seen Perry?"

"Yep—but please stay, Jane."

Out in the rain once more Jane stood trying to make up her mind what to do. Of course Margery and Perry had returned from the bay and had gone to Winchester together, and everything was all right. She was, she assured herself, a perfect goose to get excited.

She paused and looked at the dreary gray bay. Still, she would walk down to the club and ask if Perry's boat had come in yet—just to make sure.

The group of men she had seen on the wharf with Mary and Perry were sitting by the fire-side smoking and talking, but no one else was about. After some searching, Jane found the janitor in the little pantry, contentedly reading his paper.

He had not seen the boat come, but apparently he felt no concern. "They'll have to put in," he insisted. "Perry wouldn't stay out in no squall like this!"

"But won't you go and see if the boat is here?" persisted Jane.

Unwillingly, the man put down his paper and went out. "It ain't in the boat-house," he announced, coming back. "But perhaps Perry has anchored it in the bay an' come in

shore in somebody's canoe—he does that sometimes.”

“Can't you see the boat in the bay?”

“No, ma'am, I can't. You might take a squint along the other wharves. They might have put in down there.”

To Jane's anxious inquiries along the public wharves there was but one answer: no one had seen Perry's boat.

“Guess he ain't got in yet,” said one old salt, more communicative than the others. “His bo't's well known—real sociable chap he is. Hope he ain't got caught in the squall. There's been a heap of parties drowned off that there p'int.”

“Oh, don't, don't!” cried Jane.

“There was young Jim Spruance,” continued the man, delighting in horrors after the manner of his kind, “three summers ago he went out in a gale, an' the fust thing anybody knowed about him, was findin' his bo't floatin' upside down.”

Jane ran back to the club-house. Perhaps Dick would know where Margery and Perry were. She would telephone to him, and then her mind entirely at ease—for of course they

must be safe at Winchester—she would go home. Cousin Willy must be wondering what had become of her.

She went to the office and rang up the hotel in Winchester where Dick and Sam were staying. The clerk who answered was doubtful if he could find Dick, but after a long interval, in which Jane stood first on one foot and then on the other, Dick's voice said, "Hello!"

"Oh, Dick, this is Jane. I'm sorry to bother you, but is Perry there with you?"

"No. He hasn't come over yet."

"Well, do you know whether Margery is with Mrs. Endicott—they were going to have dinner at the country club?"

"Why, really, Jane, I couldn't tell you—we boys are all going to have dinner here and then go up to the club later."

"Dick, I'm feeling rather worried about Margery and Perry—they went out in the sailboat before the rain."

"What? I can't hear you—there's such a racket here. Sorry!"

Jane's voice rose shrilly. "Margery and Perry went out in Perry's boat before the rain."

"Out in the boat—with a storm coming? You couldn't hire Perry to take a girl along on a trip like that."

"But, Dick—they did go! It was all that Mary's fault." Breathlessly, Jane poured forth the story.

"Hmm," said Dick as she finished. "Perry wouldn't stay out in a storm like this. They're probably down at the club having tea."

"I'm here at the club now. The *Sally* hasn't come in—and it isn't at any of the other wharves."

"Hmm," Dick's voice sounded anxious. "Well, I'll tell you what we will do. Jack has got the car here, and we'll run down to the country club, and if Margery is there all right I'll telephone you. You're at the boat club, you say? All right—I won't be long."

He rang off and Jane sank down beside the telephone booth to wait. The men in front of the fireplace went out laughing and talking and a deep quiet settled down. Outside, Jane could hear the rain beating against the windows; from the big living-room came the sound of a log in the fireplace breaking and falling

apart with a shower of sparks. A clock ticked over her head, each tick seeming louder as the deserted building grew quieter and quieter. Jane turned and watched it. Five, ten minutes ticked slowly away.

At last, unable to control her nervousness and sense of dread, she went into the living-room and picked up a magazine at random. The telephone bell rang.

She ran to answer it.

"Is this the Sparhawk Inn?" squeaked a voice, and Jane put back the receiver.

The silence settled down again. Jane tried to put her thoughts on the magazine in her hand, which happened to be a comic weekly, reading over and over the same joke, vainly trying to understand it.

At last the telephone bell rang. "Jane," Dick's tone was worried, "have you learned anything more?—Margery isn't here—the girls say she decided to stay home and see Katie off."

"Oh, Dick—then she is out in the boat?"

"I'm afraid so. We 'phoned to Mary's family—they don't know anything about her either—haven't seen her since luncheon. We're

going to get into communication with the life-saving stations at once."

Dick called off, but Jane stood staring at the telephone, still holding the receiver to her ear. Margery, dear Margery, what was happening to her, what had already happened?

"Operator?" questioned the girl at the exchange. With a groan Jane hung up the receiver and went home.

Cousin Willy had been anxiously watching for her. "Why, Jane," she cried, throwing open the door, "what has happened—what kept you so long?"

Briefly as she could, Jane told the story.

Cousin Willy was grave. "They may be all right," she said. "Until we know definitely we can always hope. But we can't help feeling anxious."

Jane dropped into a chair. "Oh, dear," she cried. "Oh, dear!"

"Come, come—you mustn't collapse yet. Come out into the kitchen, where it is warmer." Cousin Willy took off Jane's wet raincoat and piloted her out into the kitchen, where she made her drink some hot tea.

"But, Cousin Willy," Jane exclaimed, put-

ting down her cup, "think of it—Margery, dear little Margery. Oh, suppose anything has happened—what will her father and mother do? And her grandfather? He adores her."

"And what will Mr. Watkins do? Perry is the apple of his eye. He has been so proud of the boy; of his ability, and his fine physique, and his splendid truthful nature."

"Oh, don't, Cousin Willy, don't!"

"Yes, we mustn't talk that way, Jane. I'm sure they are all right—they must be all right. We are just feeling anxious—unnecessarily so, perhaps. The storm seems to be going over—see, it's raining very gently now, and the wind has died down."

She drew her chair nearer to the stove. "How chilly it is getting—we must build a fire in the dining-room fireplace."

The front door opened, and there were rapid footsteps through the house. "Jane, Jane!" called Jack.

Jane ran into the dining-room. "Oh, Jack, have you heard anything?"

"No. Dick has gone out with the men from the life-saving station in their power boat. He's been friendly with the captain ever since he

came up. I wanted to go, but they took Dick. I—I—well, Perry ——” He stopped, unable to go on.

Jane read unspoken anguish in the boy's eyes. “It will be all right, Jack, I am sure it will,” she said bravely. “Perry is too good a sailor to let anything happen. They have probably put into port somewhere.”

“I'm going down to the club wharf. Dick will signal if they find them.”

“I'll go with you.”

“But first, Jack,” interposed Cousin Willy, “you must have some hot tea—it will be chilly down there on the wharf.”

“Aunt Kate got into communication with the life-saving station at Winchester,” he said as he took the cup. “What time did Perry and Margery go out, Jane?”

Again Jane told the story.

“Mary Benton was bound to make trouble for somebody this summer,” he commented bitterly. “She's been so set on showing off. I'm glad that Perry ——” He paused; it was hard for him to say it, but he went on bravely. “I'm *glad* that Perry went with those two girls. They would be badly off without him.

Margery doesn't know a thing about boats, and Mary doesn't know so very much more. If you're ready, Jane, we'll go."

Taking a lantern they started off for the club. It was closed; the janitor, evidently thinking that it would not be used that cold, rainy evening, had locked up and gone home. In the lee of the building they found a fairly comfortable spot where they could stare out over the black water.

"Jack! There's a signal now," cried Jane. "See—there! Now!"

"It's only the revolving light on the point."

"Oh! Oh, dear!"

Jane sank back again and buried her cold hands in her pockets. She felt that she could never stand the strain of waiting, waiting. She wished that Jack would say something; but he was silent, crouching with his legs drawn up and his forehead resting on his knees.

"Jack!" cried Jane again, "there's a light now—perhaps it's a signal!"

Jack sprang up. "Where?" he cried hoarsely. "Where?"

The light drew nearer.

Jack picked up the lantern and started down the long dark wharf.

“It’s only Mr. Morse looking after his boat,” he said, coming back. With a long sigh he crouched down again.

Jane stared out over the black water, and shook with a nervous chill. Suddenly through the darkness there was the sound of some one crying and of stumbling footsteps, and Andrew came upon them.

“I saw the lantern,” he sobbed, “an’ I thought it was you. Oh, Jane, I want Perry so!”

He threw himself into Jane’s arms, and she held him fast.

“It will be all right, dear,” she soothed him; “the boat from the life-saving station has gone out, and they will find them. I’m sure they will.”

Afraid that Andrew might take cold she wrapped her raincoat and golf cape about him as best she could. Exhausted by his fright and crying, the child grew quiet and drowsy. Jane’s arms ached from the burden of the relaxed heavy little body, but she continued to hold him fast, finding help and strength in the

necessity of comforting something younger and weaker than herself.

Suddenly Jack sprang to his feet. "There comes a boat," he cried. "They are back earlier than I expected. They didn't signal! I ——" He ran down the wharf.

The boat drew in and Dick got out.

"We found the sailboat," he said brokenly; "it was upside down. That—that—was—all we found."

CHAPTER XXII

WAITING

QUIETLY they went up to the Endicott cottage. There was nothing else for them to do but to wait.

"They may know more at Winchester," Dick had said.

The frightened maids had built a fire in the living-room fireplace and they clustered about it. They were all very silent; Jack had collapsed on the big divan, lying face downward; Jane sat in a low chair with Andrew in her lap, while Dick prowled nervously about, going every few minutes to the front door to open it and look out into the dreary night.

"The storm seems to be pretty well over," he reported, coming back and gazing thoughtfully into the fire. "Everything's pretty wet and dripping yet. I wonder—what's that?"

There was a noise outside, and he went to the door. Jack sprang up and hurried after him. Jane listened intently.

“Just the Prestons,” said Dick, closing the door. “They’d heard the news and came to inquire.”

With a groan Jack threw himself face downward on the divan again, and Andrew, frightened at his brother’s despair, dug his sunburnt fists into his eyes and tried manfully not to cry. Jane forgot her own dread in a feeling of pity for the boys. She wished that she knew what to say to comfort them. She forgot that they were detested stepbrothers and thought of them with the yearning sympathy a real sister might have had.

There were rapid footsteps across the veranda and Cousin Willy came in. “Does Mr. Morris know?” she asked when she heard the news.

Dick shook his head. “I couldn’t tell him,” he answered. “He thinks that Margery is at Winchester with Mrs. Endicott. He’s very delicate, and we must spare him all we can. There is no reason why he should know until ——” He stopped abruptly and with his

hands deep in his pockets walked to the window.

Silence settled down again and Jane sat staring into the already dying fire. Her thoughts were sad and reproachful ones. Step by step she was reviewing her acquaintance with Perry. How concerned he had been that first day when he thought he had run her down with the car; how kind he had been about dancing with her that night at the dance when she had been so neglected and unhappy. Jane had come to learn how sought after he was as a dancing partner. With an aching heart she remembered how sincerely anxious he had been to welcome his new mother and sisters and to make their paths pleasant ones, and how hurt he had been at her refusal to be friendly. She recalled how little spoiled he had been by his good looks and his ability, and by his position as a rich man's son. Suppose that the worst were to happen, what would Jack and Andrew do? How would they bear his loss? And how would his father bear it? Across the dark sea Jane's heart suddenly went out in sympathy to that hated stepfather.

She remembered that he had lost a little

girl, and that he had wanted her to take something of the place of that daughter. Jane, gazing at the dull red embers, clasped Andrew tight and tortured herself with the thought that if she had not refused to accept her stepfather and brothers, they now might all be safe and happy in the old Berkshire home, and that disaster would not be hovering close.

Dick jumped to his feet. "I can't stand it any longer," he muttered. "Got to do something—going down to the life-saving station."

Jane hesitated; then she ran after Dick and joined him. Together they splashed along the road leading through the village to the life-saving station. The rain had stopped and now and then the moon shone from behind the shifting clouds, lighting up the little pools of water lying in the roadway. Through the lighted windows of the summer cottages and the homes of the village people they could see happy groups.

"Doesn't it seem strange to you, Dick," Jane observed, "that all these people can be so happy when we're feeling so miserable?"

"I suppose that the people in Europe are

wondering—if they have time to wonder at all—how we can be so care-free over here when they have such awful things hanging over them.”

Jane did not answer. She was thinking of those staring headlines in the paper, and wondering where her mother was and what she was doing. Cousin Willy was sure she must be safe, but suppose —— She stopped, not daring to let herself think.

But if only she had not made her mother so unhappy! And Marion, too. She had not written to Marion all summer. She would write to-morrow and ask to be forgiven.

Dick hurried along in silence, and Jane, taking short, hurried little steps to keep up with his long strides, splashing through puddles and stumbling over inequalities in the ground, met her conscience face to face, and sorrowfully repented.

The guard at the station was not very encouraging. They had communicated with the station at Winchester, but the boat there had not come in yet, and they knew nothing. There was just the chance, of course, that some fishing boat might have come to the rescue of

those in the sailboat, but it was useless to count on it.

Deeply depressed they climbed the hill back to the house.

Jack was waiting for them. "Have you any news?" he cried. "I've been out trying to get Aunt Kate on the telephone. Can't get her anywhere. I don't see why she doesn't send us some message!"

Sadly they went into the house and sat down.

An automobile stopped before the door, and someone called.

"There's somebody!" cried Cousin Willy.

They ran outside. A strange man was climbing out of the car, and Jane heard him giving Dick directions about warm blankets. Jane raised brimming eyes to him. "Is—is ——" she faltered.

He smiled and pointed to the back seat. Someone moved and spoke her name in a low voice, and Jane realized that it was Margery.

"Margie," she cried, "oh, Margie, what has ——" She stopped, conscious that Margery was very white and exhausted, and that she was wrappd in strange, uncouth garments,

and that her curls were wet and hanging about her face.

Margery spoke again. "Jane," she said faintly. "Perry—is ——"

The car moved away.

Jane's heart stood still. The worst had happened then. She slipped her hand under Jack's arm. "Jack," she said softly, "you must be brave. Your father ——"

Another car drew up, and from the back they lifted a tall figure with a bandaged arm.

The strange man waved them all aside except Jack and Dick. "Here, you boys," he said, "you'll have to help to carry him in."

They drew aside and slowly and carefully Perry was carried into the house. Jane ran to hold the door open.

As the little procession passed her Perry opened his sunken eyes, and a faint smile crossed his haggard face. "It's all right, sister Jane," he said weakly, and his eyelids closed.

CHAPTER XXIII

OPEN DOORS

MARGERY never could speak of that afternoon.

“ I don’t remember—I can’t remember!” she would cry if questioned. “ We just hung on and on, and it was so cold.”

She only knew that they had clung on in the darkness and the storm to that frail, bobbing little upturned boat; that she had grown colder and colder and at last almost unconscious, and that she would have let go if it had not been for Perry’s firm grasp beneath her shoulders and Perry’s voice urging and commanding her to keep on. She had been too exhausted to feel more than a vague relief when she was lifted on board the fishing boat that had found them floating in the stormy sea.

The sail down the bay had been a pleasant one. As the *Prudent Sally* left the wharf,

Margery had settled down near the bow, enjoying the rapid motion and the fresh wind blowing against her face. It was nice of Mary, she thought, to want her to come. She was glad that someone wanted her.

At the mouth of the bay Perry had tried to persuade Mary to turn back, but Mary had only laughed at him and, calling him "Old Granny," had kept the boat headed for the open sea.

"We must go out and wave to Margery's friend, the waitress, as she goes by in the Winchester boat," she declared. "For shame, Perry," she laughed; "are you such a snob that you won't wave to a waitress?"

Perry flushed and was silent, but as the wind rose and the waves grew rougher he had insisted on taking the rudder from Mary.

The big boat from Winchester went by, and Margery had waved violently to a familiar little figure that fluttered a white handkerchief in return. The steamer churned itself almost out of sight and Perry persisted that they must go back to land.

Then the wind and rain had come.

After that Margery could remember very

little. The rain had come down harder and harder, and the waves had risen and the little boat had rolled and plunged. She had been frightened, and Perry's face had been very grim and set as he clung to the rudder and gave orders to Mary; and Mary had lost her head and collapsed, a pitiful sobbing heap, in the bottom of the boat. Margery had tried to help, but she was only one slender girl against the forces of the wind and sea.

And then, somehow, she had found herself struggling in the cold water.

The rest, mercifully, was mainly a blank to her. She knew that Perry had helped her to reach the overturned boat and then had followed the desperate effort just to cling on.

What she did remember was the gradual coming back to full consciousness on the fishing boat, a crude place and smelling horribly of fish, but a blessed refuge. The fisherman had been kind to her, and warmed, and wrapped in the rough dry clothes they gave her, she was content to lie in the bunk, utterly weary and utterly thankful. With her thankfulness had crept in a feeling of shame that she had allowed herself to be so upset by the little things

of life, the little hurts and slights. She had been very close to the great verities in that stormy sea, and everything else had fallen away into insignificance.

The exposure had left her weak and exhausted, and it was not until several days had passed that she was strong enough to be told that Perry's arm had been broken and that he was very ill, and that Mary Benton had been lost.

It was a great shock to her. "I thought they were safe! Oh, I thought they were safe!" she would cry, sitting up in bed, feverish and hoarse. "They told me on the fishing boat that everyone was safe! Poor Mary, oh, poor, poor Mary! And are you sure Perry will get well? He tried so hard to save us!"

In the long night watches when she could not sleep, she grew very close to Polly. At the first sound from Margery's room Polly would slip from her bed and, going to the excited, feverish girl would sit beside her, smoothing her hand or singing one of her funny tuneless songs, or oftener just quietly talking.

When they carried her down to the big veranda over the water Margery grew better,

although she remained weak and languid and would lie for hours silently staring out to sea.

“To think,” she said one afternoon, “that Friday is my birthday. I feel too old to have birthdays!”

Polly turned toward her. “We were going to have a surprise party for you, Margery Daw, a great big one—but of course now we won’t on poor Mary’s account. But if Perry is well enough he is coming over and we’ll just have a little family party with the boys and Jane, and ourselves. Isn’t it nice to be able to ask Jane and the Watkins boys to things without anybody feeling uncomfortable? Jane gets along with the boys beautifully now. Mrs. Endicott says she doesn’t know what she would have done without her, for she has been perfectly wonderful with Perry. Poor Perry had been so depressed. The doctor really was very much worried about him for a while. A real sister couldn’t have been more comforting and helpful than Jane. She has been ever so brave too, for she really is awfully worried about her mother over there in Europe. When I stopped in to see Katherine this morning Jane was there reading to Perry, as cosy and



“TO THINK,” SHE SAID, “THAT FRIDAY IS MY BIRTHDAY”

contented a family group as you could wish to see."

Margery smiled. "When she came to see me this morning she spoke of Perry and Jack a lot."

"Would you like to hear more about the party we had planned?" asked Polly.

Margery nodded, and Polly, delighted to have found a subject that might interest her, hurried on with her story.

"We were going to have everybody. A great big party, all the boys and girls here, and some of the boys Dick and Sam have come to know at Winchester. We were going to have progressive games first—your grandfather was a perfect dear, and said that we could do just as we pleased—and then afterward we were going to dance. Jane was a wonder at thinking things up to do, and she designed the prettiest tally cards and dance cards and little prizes. And the boys were the greatest help, too. That is, Dick and Sam were—the Watkins boys couldn't be in it much on account of Jane, of course."

"You see, Margery," put in Esther, "you have been such a wonderful hostess and have

made us all have such a scrumptious time that we felt we simply must do something for you."

"We were going to tell you at first," added Polly, "but we knew that if you were aware of what was going on the very first thing that would happen would be that *you* would be giving the party somehow for *us*!"

"And Margery," laughed Esther, "you were the hardest person to keep anything from! You were always guessing that something was up and asking us questions—until really we didn't know which way to turn! We were so afraid that you might find it out and that the whole thing would fall flat. And we had such a time trying to arrange for things under your very nose. When you went to see Katie off it gave us a chance to order the refreshments and select the prizes. Why, Margery—what is the matter?"

With her head buried in the cushions of her chair Margery was quivering with convulsive sobs.

She slept badly that night, and Polly, hearing her tossing and tumbling, went to her. "What's the trouble, honey?" she asked.

“Oh, Polly,” sighed Margery, seizing Polly’s cool hand between her two hot ones, “life is awfully hard. It’s so hard to know what to do. When I first went to Renwyck’s Town I had to get over being a horrid selfish little pig—that seemed hard enough to do. And then I went and tried to do good to people and made an awful mess of things—and life seemed queer and complicated. And then I came up here, and began to have hurt feelings, and to be queer and jealous. Oh, Polly, it was awful. I knew that something was up about the surprise party, and I thought that you were laughing at me behind my back—and I was so hurt and horrid. Perhaps if I had not been so hurt that day I shouldn’t have gone out with Mary,—and all this dreadful thing wouldn’t have happened.”

Polly made no answer, but patted her arm.

“I wonder what it will be next?” said Margery after a while.

“There’s always something, I suppose,” Polly said sagely. “The only thing to do is not to expect perfection and to go ahead as best you can.”

Gradually the shadow of tragedy lifted from

the little group, although neither Perry nor Margery could ever forget. After several long talks with her grandfather, Margery came to have a more normal view of her own sensitiveness and also, although poor Mary's memory was never blamed, to recognize something of the disaster a reckless young girl, less really proficient in athletics than vain, too often brings upon herself and those about her.

On the evening of her birthday the little group met once again at the Morris cottage. They were a little more subdued than usual, for Perry and Margery were still rather frail, but they were very happy.

Jane was especially contented, for a cablegram had come just before she left Buttercup Cottage from her mother saying that she was safe in England and would be home as soon as passage could be procured.

"Hasn't it been fun?" whispered Polly to Jane as good-byes were being said at the end of the evening. "It's too bad, though, that Margery couldn't have had her surprise party! Oh, what's that?"

There was the sound of an automobile stop-

ping, and the front door opened. Turning, the girls saw enter a tall graceful woman with a wealth of light curly hair, and behind her a tall dark young man with clear cut features like Margery's.

There was a cry and Margery came running across the room. "Oh, mamma! Oh, papa!"

Jane smiled at Polly. "That's a better surprise party than the one we had planned," she said.

Her stepbrothers took Jane home. "Isn't Mrs. Morris sweet?" she chattered to them. "And isn't Mr. Morris young and handsome? Just think, father and mother will be home soon, too! We must give them a wonderful welcome when they come."

Andrew looked up at her and smiled his funny, toothless smile. "It's nice to hear you say 'father and mother,' Jane. It sounds so homey."

"It sure does," agreed Jack.

They strolled on in silence, Jane thinking of her mother and of the stepfather she meant to welcome. And after all, she decided, it was going to be pleasant to have big brothers to go

about with, and a little brother to love and pet.

“Do you remember, Perry, what you said to me once about the Irish having a saying that when God closes one door He opens two?”

The boys left her at the door and Jane went in.

Cousin Willy was sitting by the table knitting. “Well, did you have a pleasant evening?” she asked.

Jane sat down and threw back her cloak. “Oh, a lovely time,” she said happily.

Cousin Willy glanced up at her, noting her animation and the warm color in her cheeks. “Do you know, Jane,” she said, “you have improved a good deal this summer. Your mother will be very much pleased when she sees you. You’re not nearly so awkward and shy, and really, you look ——” She was about to say “you look very pretty,” but as she was Cousin Willy she hastily changed it into “you look rather neat and fat.”

Jane laughed. Cousin Willy’s critical attitude toward her no longer irritated or depressed her,

“Yes,” she said gaily, “I’ve been going through opened doors. Margery has helped me to break a trace.” She laughed. “I mean,” she cried, “to take a brace!”

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